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# **Language, Discourse & Society**

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The editorial board will consider proposed articles based on clear methodological and theoretical commitment to studies of language. Articles must substantially engage theory and/or methods for analyzing language, discourse, representation, or situated talk.

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# Language, Discourse & Society

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Language & Society  
Research Committee 25 of the  
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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

It's a pleasure for me to introduce the articles of the second issue of journal "*Language, Discourse and Society*", an international peer reviewed journal with a scientific board composed by the members of the International Sociological Association RC25 executive board.

The contents of the second issue includes 7 articles. The first article "front and backstage in social media", by Anders Persson, offers a comparative analysis of face-to-face interaction and interaction in social media by using Erving Goffman's system model of communication and by comparing expressions given, expressions given off and front- and backstage in face-to-face interaction and interaction in social media. The article shows that to the communicative situation in which social media users find themselves, may have paradoxical outcomes: on the one hand, the users can present themselves in a highly controlled manner while, on the other hand, the risk of oversharing appears to be great.

The second article comes from Emilia Nercissians, and it is titled "life and culture of Armenians in Iran". The paper suggests the need for major revisions in well-established historical interpretations of the role and contribution of Armenians as a displaced minority community in the modernization process of Iran. The author argues that the ability to switch between different socio-cultural standards in the domain of role balancing, the Iranian Armenian community has played a crucial role in the modernization process, not only in Iran, but also in the international scale, that has largely been underestimated or altogether neglected due to many internal and external causes.

The third article, "teaching the representations of africa in the writings of the diaspora: a call for the re-definition of african american literature" is a contribution from Moussa Traore. The article presents the researcher's experience teaching a course in African and African American Literature to students in College in the mid West of the US. The article exposes the diversity in the student population and the various texts chosen for the course, and it also provides the reader with the students' responses or reactions to the various texts chosen for the course syllabus, and also the students' reactions to the instructor's pedagogical approach. The article ends with a call for the redefinition and revision of the scope of the field and also of the curriculum of African American Literature course



The fourth article, Mara Morelli's "hacia una visión integradora de la interpretación y de la mediación", presents the results of a four-year experimentation of community mediation services in the city of Genova (Italy), which shows high rates of migrant residents. Community mediation is analyzed in its outcomes in different contexts, from healthcare to educational, by focusing in both the social and the linguistic aspects of intercultural communication.

The fifth article, Musa Movlievich Yusupov & Seda Musaevna Yusupova's "the functioning of the idioms representing the concept work in the Chechen language" article considers the use of idioms representing the semantic field "work" in the Chechen language on the material of the psycholinguistic inquiry. The authors analyse different aspects of the functioning of this layer of lexical system in speech. Inquiry shows that many idioms are used not so often and are unfamiliar to young representatives of the Chechen people while the group of people of the senior generation knew the meaning of these idioms, that is some idioms leave the active use.

The sixth article, "language and identity: a case study on matchmaking discourse (Javanese and Islamic perspectives)", by Ribut Wahyudi, examines "Matchmaking", which is a unique phenomena in Indonesian society, primarily in Javanese culture. Matchmaking is usually performed by the one having a closed relationship with both boy and girl considering to start a serious relationship. In the article, matchmaking is elaborated in the context where one of the parties is typical of a shy girl. The match maker is the girl's relative who facilitated "relationship establishment" with the writer. It is done through chatroom as the writer and the matchmaker were in a faraway distance (different countries). The article shows how factors such as profession, wealth, religion and education are considered and govern the chatting interaction.

The seventh article, "a genre analysis of death announcements in Ghanaian newspapers", from Joseph B.A. Afful, investigates the death announcement (DA) genre in terms of its schematic structure and linguistic features. The study examines a data set of 636 DAs from three leading public newspapers in Ghana, identifying seven moves out of which five were obligatory and two optional. In addition, each move had distinctive lexico-grammatical features. Finally, the article shows this schematic structure, together with the lexico-grammatical features, points to a definitive set of socio-cultural norms and values of Ghanaians.

The eighth article, Wincharles Coker's "overcoming the stigma: a conversation analysis of

interviews with people living with HIV/AIDS on Ghana television" explores two interviews granted to four Ghanaians living with HIV/AIDS on Ghana Television. The interviews are analysed based on conversation analysis. The article indicates that victims of HIV are becoming increasingly bold to break away from the shackles of stigmatization and self-motivated to educate and encourage other selves affected by the disease.

Language, Discourse & Society has its ISSN code and it's going to be listed in the most important databases of Open Access Journals. I would like to highlight that all published articles in *Language, Discourse & Society* are eligible for the two RC 25 awards, The "Language & Society Graduate Student Award" and the "Language & Society Academic Award". More details are available in this issue. If you are interested in proposing an article, you may find the call for papers for *Language, Discourse, & Society* in this issue.

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## FRONT- AND BACKSTAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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### **Abstract**

Oversharing of information about one's private life or the private lives of others appears to be an oft-noted phenomenon in the context of social media. This paper aims at answering the following question: What is it in social media as media and in the communicative situation of the person using them that facilitate oversharing of private information? A comparative analysis of face-to-face interaction and interaction in social media is conducted. The two forms of interaction are compared, firstly, by using Erving Goffman's system model of communication, which consists of eight different system requirements and system constraints, and, secondly, by comparing expressions given, expressions given off and front- and backstage in face-to-face interaction and interaction in social media. The difference between face-to-face interaction and social media has to do with differences in the very natures of the two forms of interaction. The almost automatic coordination between interactors that we find in face-to-face interaction has in social media been replaced by a ping-pong model of interaction in which the technical limitations on the flows of expressions make the transitions in terms of turn-taking, framing and back-channel cues highly distinct and mechanical. When it comes to the communicative situation in which social media users find themselves, it appears to be paradoxical: on the one hand, the users can present themselves in a highly controlled manner while, on the other hand, the risk of oversharing appears to be great.

**Keywords:** face-to-face interaction, social media, oversharing, Erving Goffman, front- and backstage, expressions given, expressions given off

## 1. Introduction

Sharing too much information about one's private life or the private lives of other people appears to be a relatively common phenomenon (or at least an often noted problem) on the Internet and in particular in social media, such as blogs and social network sites like Myspace and Facebook. These sites may be fully open or available only to a network of personally identified "friends," (friend meaning someone you know or someone that knows someone you know or someone who knows of you). Some people using social media seems to push the borders between what is normally considered private and public, proper and improper and headlines such as the following point in this direction: "All of you are fools! Online comments bring out the worst in readers" (*Dagens Nyheter*<sup>1</sup> Oct. 30, 2009) and "Choose your friends. You can't trust anyone on Facebook" (*Dagens Nyheter* Jan. 22, 2010). Even particularly media-experienced people seems to think out loud far too much on Facebook, for example a media consultant in the Danish Liberal Party who made her feelings known on Facebook, calling the pope a "pig", referring to one politician identified by name as "power mad" and to another person as a "psychopath," and characterizing the opinions of the Queen of Denmark as "brain dead" (*Helsingborgs Dagblad*<sup>2</sup> April 7, 2010). The question is not whether these statements are true or not, rather if it's appropriate to say them in public or not. In other words: if the statements belong to a front or a back region and consequently being front- or backstage (Goffman 1959).

Not maintaining the border between front- and backstage is often characterized as a problem of oversharing, which means that users of blogs and social network sites tend to disclose too much information, or overly private information (see e.g. Gould 2008). This oversharing of information has been commented on in articles with titles such as "25 Things I Didn't Want to Know About You" in Time magazine (Suddath 2009). In a scientific context, Walther and others have launched the so-called "hyperpersonal communication model", which shows that interpersonal relationships can grow more quickly with the help of computer-mediated communication than through face-to-face communication (Walther 1996; Hian et al. 2004), and also supports warnings to the effect that caution is needed online (e.g. Main 2006). Wallace (1999) also touched upon this in her study on the psychology of the Internet: "Paradoxically, some aspects of the net draw out our warmth and openness and lead the shy out of their shells." (1999: 234).

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<sup>1</sup> A Swedish newspaper.

<sup>2</sup> A Swedish newspaper.

Recently such oversharing of information has also enabled employers and government agencies to monitor people via social media. In a study, the recruiting company Manpower found that 17% of the managers who participated in the study had checked out job applicants online, with the reason most often given being that "they wanted to see whether the applicant's personality fit with the company" (*Dagens Nyheter*, Jan. 29, 2009). Some time ago the Danish Broadcasting Corporation reported that a number of Danish municipal administrators were using Facebook to discover social insurance cheats. Because some people generously share their private lives on Facebook, the municipality was able to discover that, for instance, someone who had stated that they were living separately was actually living with a man when she posted on Facebook that "he is lazy when it comes to doing the vacuuming" (*Danish Broadcasting Corporation*, Jan. 24, 2009). Further, American universities reportedly check up on potential students by studying their self-representations in online social media (Jaschik 2009). Depending on the social media being used, parents are also able to monitor their own children's activities in these media. Barnes (2006) speaks in this context of a "privacy paradox," which means that young people disclose information about themselves in order to be able to participate in social network sites and are then surprised when their parents gain access to that information. In a study of bloggers, Viégas (2006) shows that even though the bloggers know they are responsible for the contents of their blogs, they do not appear to be aware of the risk that the information they post on their blogs could be misused.

In this paper<sup>3</sup> I will analyze oversharing in social media, using and thereby demonstrating the usefulness of some of the central concepts of Erving Goffman. The purpose of the paper is to answer the following question:

What is it in social media as media and in the communicative situation of the person using them that facilitate oversharing of private information?

## **2. Differences and similarities between physically proximate interaction and social media**

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3 A former version of the paper was presented in the session "Studies of Language: Contributions to the Discipline" organized by the Research Committee Language and Society at the XVII World Congress of Sociology, Gothenburg July 11-17, 2010, arranged by the International Sociological Association (ISA). I wish to thank Dr. Corinne Kirchner, Dr. Wade Nelson, Mr. Max Persson, and Dr. Lisbeth Ranagården for feedback on an earlier version of the paper. Part of this article also appears in Swedish in my book *Ritualisering och sårbarhet - ansikte mot ansikte med Goffmans perspektiv på social interaktion* [Ritualization and vulnerability - face-to-face with Goffman's perspective on social interaction] (Liber publishing house 2012). A summary in English is available in the Erving Goffman Archives: <http://cdclv.unlv.edu/ega/articles/ritualization.pdf>

We do not watch the Internet in the way we watch TV, writes Castells (2009: 64), but rather we live the Internet. A great deal of what occurs in our face-to-face lives also obviously appears on the Internet.<sup>4</sup> Many people report on their lives and comment on what is happening in a diary-like manner in blogs.<sup>5</sup> Something similar occurs on the microblog Twitter,<sup>6</sup> albeit using a maximum of 140 characters per post. Facebook<sup>7</sup> is one of many "social network sites" that can be used to build and display one's own personal network.<sup>8</sup> All of these Internet applications resemble the face-to-face world, but are not identical to it. The difference between blogs and traditional diaries is that diaries are private, while blogs are open to others. One difference between Facebook and social networks in the face-to-face world is that, as noted above, it is possible to have thousands of Facebook friends, as a result of the expansion of the word "friend" to encompass everything from what we usually would refer to as a friend to acquaintances of acquaintances whom we do not even know personally. Most of what is on the Internet is also interactive in the sense that you can comment on what other people write, as frequently occurs in social media, and share in the interactions of others. This alters the social interaction to some extent, in that the Internet's interactivity allows us to approach strangers, something that can be difficult in f2f, as Goffman (1971), in particular, has shown. This interactivity also gives rise to other interesting features, such as the Internet tools that are used to manage party invitations (for example Evite). These tools make it possible to monitor the process in which invited guests accept, decline, or simply fail to respond to an invitation. The invitees are thus exposed to a sort of anonymous group pressure to behave appropriately, such as by responding to the invitation. Even online commemorative sites for the dead, such as "Eviga minnen" ["The Eternal Memory"] ([www.evigaminnen.se](http://www.evigaminnen.se)) and "Tributes" ([www.tributes.com](http://www.tributes.com)) offer a form of interactivity in that the visitor can light a candle for the dead person, or even write in a guest book, addressing comments to the survivors or even to the dead person.

"Living" the Internet thus does not mean that we live it in the same way we live our face-to-face lives. There are, for instance, differences between social interaction on the Internet and

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4 Internet has 2.1 billion users, according to Internet World Stats: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (visited 2012-01-16).

5 152 million users according to Pingdom 2011-01-12: <http://royal.pingdom.com/2011/01/12/internet-2010-in-numbers/> (visited 2012-01-16).

6 Around 100 million users (McMillan 2011).

7 800 million users according to Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics> (visited 2012-01-16).

8 Boyd & Ellison define such sites as those where individuals can: 1. create wholly or partly public profiles that are accessible within a limited system, and 2. display a list of other users within the same system with whom they have contact. According to Boyd & Ellison (2008: 211), social network sites are not primarily about "networking" with strangers, but rather about displaying one's private network and communicating within it.

face to face. Determining what even constitutes social interaction on the Internet requires some measure of thought, since the interaction does not occur face to face (f2f) but rather is mediated by computers that are connected in a network. The network user creates representations of him or herself, with the help of which he or she can communicate with other people's representations. The representation is an assumed character, a role or mask that can differ substantially from, or be nearly identical to, the person who assumes it. The mere fact of adopting a user name, even if it is one's own name, entails the creation of a representation that is not identical with the person assuming it. In the pages below I will consequently refer to such a representation as a persona, and refer to any interaction between such personae on the Internet as persona-to-persona interaction (p2p). I would thus also point out that those who interact in this way can never be truly certain that the persona with whom they are letting their own persona interact is really a representation of the particular person with whom they believe they are interacting. However, this difference must not be overstated, as we cannot be fully certain that the persons with whom we interact f2f are the persons they give themselves out to be, either, which is in fact one of the existential conditions for Goffman's sociological perspective. In brief, the basic idea is that we attempt to control other people's impressions of ourselves by assuming roles in relation to norms that regulate how we are supposed to interact with others, and how we are to behave, be, look, etc. In light of this, permit me to draw a comparison between f2f and p2p based on Goffman's sociological perspective.

### *2.1 A general comparison between f2f and p2p*

Goffman's studies generally address interactions between people who are in physical proximity to one another, close enough that they can see, hear and touch each other, and sometimes also sense one another's body heat and odor. Goffman refers to the information that one individual can obtain from another in such encounters as "social information," which is communicated via expressions given and expressions given off (Goffman 1959: 2). Expressions given are verbal and other symbols that the individual uses to express information. Expressions given off consist of body language and other things that the body does, such as perspiring or blushing, and which can be interpreted by others as symptomatic or non-symptomatic expressions of the individual who is giving them off.

The individual controls the expressions given to a fairly large extent. Expressions given off are an entirely different matter, and control over them lies to a greater extent with the other people in the individual's surroundings, since it is they who define the expressions being given

off by the individual as symptomatic or non-symptomatic in their perception of the individual doing the action. The boundaries between these types of expressions are not clear-cut. Expressions given off include things that the body does, sometimes against our will: perspiring, laughing, shaking, crying, different body sounds, and blushing are examples that can be interpreted by others as symptomatic of various things. Imagine a person who is about to give a lecture. He or she has learned to control the voice, which sounds steady, but for the moment he/she can do little about his hands, which are shaking because he/she is nervous. We may notice the shaking when he/she puts up an overhead picture or raises a glass of water to the lips. Inherent in this situation is a tension between the expressions that the person is giving and giving off. Another lecturer may have control over both forms of expression, while yet another may have no control over either.

Goffman writes that the very acts of existence produce expressions: "Individuals ... exude expressions" (Goffman 1970: 5). And in another context he writes: "Performers can stop giving expressions but cannot stop giving them off" (Goffman 1959: 108). Even silence can be an expression given off in cases where choosing between speaking and silence is essential. The richest interaction in terms of expressions given off is interaction face to face, since all the senses are (or can be) acted upon during the interaction. In his essay "Replies and responses" Goffman offers a detailed analysis of the conditions that prevail in a face-to-face conversation. He chooses to view the conversation as a system, whose function requires that the following conditions be met:

- "1. A two-way capability for transceiving acoustically adequate and readily interpretable messages.
2. Back-channel feedback capabilities for informing on reception while it is occurring.
3. Contact signals: means of announcing the seeking of a channeled connection, means of ratifying that the sought-for channel is now open, means of closing off a theretofore open channel. Included here, identification-authentication signs.
4. Turnover signals: means to indicate ending of a message and the taking over of the sending role by next speaker. (In the case of talk with more than two persons, next speaker selection signals, whether 'speaker selects' or 'self-select' types.)
5. Preemption signals: means of inducing a rerun, holding off channel requests, interrupting a talker in progress.



6. Framing capabilities: cues distinguishing special readings to apply across strips of bracketed communication, recasting otherwise conventional sense, as in making ironic asides, quoting another, joking, and so forth; and hearer signals that the resulting transformation has been followed.
7. Norms obliging respondents to reply honestly with whatever they know that is relevant and no more.
8. Non-participant constraints regarding eavesdropping, competing noises, and the blocking of pathways for eye-to-eye signals.” (Goffman 1981: 14-15).

Goffman describes the conversation here in a highly technical manner,<sup>9</sup> which is done for analytical purposes so that we can see the component elements as clearly as possible. We can use this description as a tool to compare face-to-face-interaction (f2f) and persona-to-persona-interaction (p2p):

**Figure 1: Comparison of f2f and p2p as communication systems**

<b>System requirements for talk as a communication system</b>	<b>f2f</b>	<b>p2p</b>
1. two-way transceiving capability	Yes	Yes
2. back-channel feedback capabilities	Yes	Limited, since the interacting individuals are not in one another's physical presence
3. contact signals	Yes	Yes
4. turnover signals	Yes	Yes, but they are taking turns mechanically.
5. preemption signals	Yes	Yes, but it is not, for instance, possible to interrupt anyone in the middle of their "speech," and interruptions can occur only after the post has been completed. The character of the interruption is however different because it has to be indicated by, for example, a change in subject or that the interactants actually tells that there is going to be an interruption.
6. framing capabilities	Yes	Limited, but present with the help of, for instance, emoticons
7. norms obliging honesty	Yes	Yes, but more difficult to monitor compliance, given the minimal social information
8. non-participant constraints	Yes	Yes, with the help of various technical solutions

Both f2f and p2p correspond to the system requirements formulated by Goffman with regard to the conversation as a communication system, although p2p is limited in various respects.

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<sup>9</sup> We would thus be dealing with talk as a communications engineer might, someone optimistic about the possibility of culture-free formulations" (Goffman 1981: 14).

The differences can generally be reflected using two metaphors: f2f may be described as an encounter between two flows of different types of expressions (both given and given off), while p2p can be likened to a ping-pong communication model in which the technical limitations on the flows of expressions make the transitions in terms of turn-taking, framing and back-channel cues highly distinct, and mechanical.<sup>10</sup> The flow from one person to another in f2f actually consists of two parallel streams that can have the same or contradictory messages. Metacommunication (communication about the ongoing communication) is also possible in that one person involved in f2f can, so to speak, comment on one stream of expressions with the help of the other.

To conclude: f2f and p2p are very different communicative situations. In conversations between people who are in physical proximity to one another, everything flows into each other and is held together by the situation being shared by the conversationalists. Take for instance the apparently trivial question "What's the time?" and the answer "Five". This conversational sequence requires a specific context, a particular situation that is shared by the conversationalists. When I posted the question "What's the time?" on Twitter and Facebook, I obviously did not get the implicit response, but rather mostly silence and in some cases, reflections on how we organize time such as "It's five o'clock here, don't know what time it is by you" or "As I read your e-mail the time is six o'clock, but I see that you sent it at five" (see also Castells 1999: 464 et seq.).

## *2.2 Broad and narrow transmission of expressions*

Differences between f2f and p2p in terms of the capacity to send and transmit expressions have a major impact on the communicative situation of the interacting person. We can speak of broad transmission in the sense that, face-to-face, we share the situation and thus transmit a large volume of expressions to one another. In the less expression-rich interactions achieved by means of various aids such as letters, telephone, e-mail, or social media, we may speak instead of narrow transmission. A broad transmission of expressions includes verbal speech, non-verbal sounds, and body language expressions. In a face-to-face conversation, we speak with one another by means of words and so-called "back-channel cues," which Goffman describes thus:

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that different types of both f2f and p2p interaction exist. There are, for instance, distinct differences between f2f interaction, in which the people involved are physically close to one another, and interaction on Skype. The latter variant of f2f lacks the elements of body language related to odor and touch, in addition to which the other person is perceived as a flat surface. In corresponding fashion there are different types of p2p interaction, depending on different technical solutions, as can be illustrated by the difference between the relative abundance of options that Facebook has to offer compared to Twitter's relative paucity.

It would be helpful to have available, and oblige the use of, 'back-channel cues' (facial gestures and nonverbal vocalizations) from hearers so that while the speaker was speaking, he could know, among other things, that he was succeeding or failing to get across, being informed of this while attempting to get across." (Goffman 1981: 12)

We can speak here of an immediate coordination between the conversationalists in which body language is extremely important. Body language is situation-dependent and, in principle, cannot be communicated beyond the situation shared by the interactors, or as Father Kent Wisti put it in a radio church service: "You can't smell sweat on Facebook" (based on a quote in *Svenska Dagbladet*<sup>11</sup> April 21, 2009). That to which we somewhat carelessly refer as body language comprises many different activities that Ekman & Friesen term "non-verbal behavior" and define as "any motion or position of the face and/or body" (1981: 57). Kendon speaks instead of "non-verbal communication," describing it as "all the ways in which, in one another's presence, people communicate without words" (1981: 3). Wiemann & Harrison (1983) delineate a particular area of social interaction that they refer to as "non-verbal interaction." Fast speaks simply of "body language" and delineates it as "all possible movements of the body, everything from the fully conscious to the 100% unconscious" (1984: 15).<sup>12</sup>

Because Goffman mainly studied interaction between physically proximate people, individuals sharing a physical space, he discussed non-verbal communication comprehensively and consistently. Expressions given off consist to a large extent of bodily expressions, and when he analyzed social interaction in public places (such as streets, parks, restaurants, theatres, stores, dance halls, and meeting rooms, to use Goffman's own examples), the point is that the individuals in a public place communicate to a large extent as bodies (often in liquid encounters). Goffman refers to this type of interaction as unfocused interaction (as opposed to focused interaction, in which the interactors have a common interaction focus) and it occurs through non-verbal expressions to a greater extent than does focused interaction. Goffman speaks here of a sort of body symbolism, a special language (body idiom) of behaviors and gestures:

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<sup>11</sup> A Swedish newspaper.

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of order, I should also note a use of a term that is related to body language, namely "body expression," which appears to be used in some psychotherapy contexts in the sense of bodily expressions that mirror the character of the individual (Lowen 1971).

Although an individual can stop talking, he cannot stop communicating through body idiom; he must say either the right thing or the wrong thing. He cannot say nothing. Paradoxically, the way in which he can give the least amount of information about himself – although this is still appreciable – is to fit in and act as persons of his kind are expected to act.” (Goffman 1966: 35)

Individuals manage and organize their social interactions in public places with the help of externalization and scanning. Goffman also refers to externalization as body gloss (Goffman 1971: 11f, 122ff), which is a sort of clarifying and amplifying of body expressions, such as occurs when, because of a mishap like a credit card getting stuck in a vending machine, a person uses exaggerated gestures to try and make the situation clear to the strangers standing in the line. Scanning refers to the ”reading” of strangers in a public place so that people can smoothly adjust to one another, such as occurs when people meet on the sidewalk.

In narrow transmission, which is narrow in the sense that it consists to a greater extent of expressions given and to a lesser extent of expressions given off, various things are done to compensate for the relative paucity of expressions given off. The scent of perfume on a love letter is one such example, as is a photo of the interactor in a Twitter exchange. The characters used in computer-mediated communication to copy expressions given off, such as smileys or emoticons,<sup>13</sup> become expressions given, since the sender fully controls them. They are often used to create distance and partially recode the content of the text in a humorous or ironic manner. The ways in which individuals express themselves in text, misspellings and other expressive peculiarities that can differentiate one person from another can become expressions given off in computer-mediated communication. For instance, how do our perceptions of a person who uses abbreviations differ from our perceptions of someone who writes words out in full, or of someone who constantly using capitals, or of someone who writes ”excrement” as opposed to someone else who writes ”shit”?

In principle, the difference between expressions given and expressions given off in f2f and p2p is that the recipient in p2phas a more limited basis for his or her interpretations of expressions given. Almost the only means of feedback available to a person sitting at her or his computer and entering text to be posted on, for instance, a blog, and which ”everyone” will soon be able to read, is expressions given. The person is not in physical proximity to the recipient, and thus has no access to the expressions given off that escape during face-to-face

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13 The development of the language in computer-mediated communication often has to do with creative adaptations to the particular conditions that apply to such communication (see, for instance, Wallace 1999 and Hård af Segerstad 2002).

interaction. The situation that he or she shares with others thus differs markedly in terms of "the human and material setting," to quote Goffman (1964: 133), since it is not a situation that is characterized by physical proximity. Here we instead encounter an "absence of regulating feedback" to borrow an expression from Kiesler et al. (1988: 661), or at least, as shown earlier, the absence of immediate regulating feedback, albeit not of delayed feedback. An interactant will, in this situation, not receive any immediate signals in the form of looks, serious faces, or knit brows from his surroundings that could induce her or him to moderate, alter, retract, explain, etc. He/she doesn't either get any uh-huhs or uhms since it would appear strange to write them (Wallace 1999: 16) and anyhow they will be received too late. His or her text is instead published in full, and changes cannot be made until after the reader has read it, and not while it is en route from brain to organ of speech, as is the case in f2f. The element of automatic coordination between interactors that is present in face-to-face encounters has been replaced in computer-mediated communication by the ping-pong model of interaction described above. This particular dynamic, which requires us, in a sense, to express a great deal from the outset and not communicate our way forward along a winding path toward shared meanings, could explain why we sometimes tend to overshare information online.

### **3. Borders between front- and backstage in social media**

The difference between front- and backstage is one of how an individual performs in relation to different audiences. Audience segregation, which is maintained with the help of barriers to perception, creates the conditions for a division into a public part of the space that is shared by individuals who are performing for one another, and another part in which those particular individuals do not share. Goffman (1959) referred to the part of the space in which the individual is more expressive in his or her actions in front of the audience as the front region, the stage, or front stage. The back region or backstage, on the other hand, is hidden from the audience. Here, individuals can (but do not have to) act differently than they would act on the front stage. Backstage actions may be influenced by the audience (e.g., by whether there is any audience at all, or whether it is a different audience from the one addressed in the front region). The relationship between these stages is not set, but rather what is shown to the audience in one instance may differ from what is shown at another time, depending, for instance, on the ways in which various institutions influence interplay between individuals. Goffman studied, in particular, two such institutions that have an immediate influence on how

borders between front- and backstage are drawn: the interaction order (Goffman 1953; 1983) and the identity-values of a society (Goffman 1963). The interaction order is, firstly, based on two different types of norms: norms of deference that regulate how we are expected to treat other people, and norms of demeanor, which regulate what we are expected to do and say in the presence of others, that is, the situational proprieties (Goffman 1959; 1967). The former type of norms pertains more to what is called ethics in the sense of morality, while the latter pertains more to etiquette interpreted as rules of social conduct. Second, the identity-values are described as normative and institutional regulations of expectations and preconceptions about how individuals are supposed to be, behave, look, and act. Deviations from the identity-values can be stigmatizing (Goffman 1963), which means that the individual becomes defined as a deviant from his or her surroundings. The norms that regulate interaction and identity can vary over time, from society to society, and between different parts of a society.

In f2f interaction, the physical proximity between the interactors is the most important constitutive factor in terms of the borders between front- and backstage. Differences between front- and backstage are established through barriers to perception and physical movements from space to space. Some places are always more backstage than others; for instance, despite changes over time, the bathroom is more backstage than public places. The individual must thus develop a sort of region competence, so that behavior can be segregated in relation to the prevailing region. This is particularly evident when it comes to all activities associated with the body and various bodily secretions. The individual develops this behavioral competence by learning to assign the right behavior to the right region, and thus learns what can be shown and what should be concealed.

The communicative situation in terms of social media is fundamentally different. It might be likened to a situation in which individuals in an apartment complex sit inside their own apartments and communicate with one another by calling out through windows that open onto a common area. Any location can serve as a node in a social online network, given the technical connectivity options that exist. The node is presumably often located in the user's home or at work or school, and that very circumstance should have a bearing on how the user communicates, specifically in that the user is often present in a private backstage area, communicating with others in the same situation. However, the communication may also be experienced by others in a manner akin to the situation in the apartment complex above, and in

that sense the user is front stage.<sup>14</sup> One might say that social media often connect back regions in the front region.

Social media entail the creation of a private place in public, the backstage nature of which is underscored in that the individual is often actually in his or her private physical back region when the communication occurs. This, I believe, can increase the likelihood of oversharing, that one might, so to speak, think out loud in a way that may be perceived as inappropriate. In a study of 124 bloggers, Mazur & Kozarian (2010) found that nearly 80% of blog posts had to do with the blogger him or herself, which could be an indication that the blog is a self-centered social medium. This could also mean that the blog is more of a backstage medium. In connection with this one can assume that it is of importance that the interactants in social media can stay anonymous and consequently to a lesser degree can be kept responsible for their writings. According to Wallace: "People can act in very uninhibited ways when they think no one can find out who they really are. In the environments that offer this, or at least offer some measure of it, people tend to let loose in both positive and negative ways." (Wallace 1999: 239).

Compared to the blog Facebook appears to be focused more on the user's social network, and the individual's network activities can be interpreted in different ways. One interesting interpretation is offered by Tufekci (2008b) in her application of Dunbar's (1996) analyses of the physically proximate socializing that arises among apes when they clean and groom one another. Dunbar believes that grooming is the most important mechanism in binding smaller groups of primates together. Indeed, the human variant of grooming, which is referred to as "verbal grooming" by Adelswärd (2009), consists of a number of different components that can be related to the establishment and maintenance of social bonds. One of these consists of a sort of constant social updating of one's personal network through gossip and chitchat, and by presenting it to and comparing it with others, that can be described as follows:

Who is doing what with whom, and whether it's a good or a bad thing; who is in and who is out, and why; how to deal with a difficult social situation involving a lover, child or colleague."(Dunbar 1996: 4)

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<sup>14</sup> In his early study of social interaction through "electronic media," Meyrowitz (1985) indicates that the boundary between public and private behavior becomes indistinct in such media. He also describes a type of gray area that arises because the boundary between front and backstage becomes unclear. See also Tufekci (2008a) for a discussion of audience segregation in social media.

This is not a description of Facebook, but rather of a chat at a café to which Dunbar's research team listened. But it could just as well have been a description of the conversation in the lunchroom of a university department, the gossip at a beauty salon, the content of a magazine with articles about celebrities, or activity on Facebook. However, while such social grooming in f2f is more interwoven into the routines of daily life, it tends, at least on Facebook, to become refined into a differentiated and specialized function.

Such social activity on Facebook could explain why the borders between front- and backstage are defined somewhat differently there than in a number of other arenas. The conversational tone on Facebook sometimes resembles that of a family that is working on their social bonds, even though many people outside the family may sometimes share in the exchange. It is possible, however, to delimit one's personal Facebook network using the various technical audience-segregating settings that the user can make in Facebook independently. Max Persson (2010) has studied this, and describes all the choices that Facebook users can make in designing their personal networks. There are fully 160 choices related to Facebook's four levels of privacy: "Everyone" (open to everyone on the Internet), "Friends of friends," "Friends Only," and "Customized" (access given only to people identified by name). However, part of the situation is the fact that Facebook is never fully private, since its owners are entitled to share in all the information on Facebook under certain conditions. Do the users then make such choices? A survey that Persson conducted among Facebook users showed that nearly half of the 155 respondents made heavy use of their ability to "control whom you will share information with on Facebook" (Persson 2010: 21). An equal percentage indicated that they had removed pictures of themselves from Facebook on several occasions because they considered them to be too personal. Although this survey is based on too small a body of material to enable generalization, one can conclude from it that a relatively large share of this particular selection of Facebook users is working actively with the border between front- and backstage. A study of the ways in which users manage photos on Facebook and Flickr points in the same direction (Van House 2009), as do the "facerape" phenomenon. This is a sort of practical joke among friends that involves posting something on someone else's Facebook page when that person has left his or her computer unguarded and is logged onto Facebook. For instance, it can occur when a coworker has gone on an errand and someone else passing by writes something derogatory about the absent person on that person's Facebook page. It is a sort of variation on losing face, and means that someone has lost control over their Facebook page for a period of time. To judge from the 699 examples that were collected by the Facebook



group F.A.C.E Raped, the backstage "content" on Facebook is generally the same as in life otherwise: the lower body, emotions, and sex.

But there are other features of social media that probably affect the definition of the borders between front- and backstage. In f2f interaction, the interactors can transmit information to one another through body language, and such information can enforce norms and make it known that certain behaviors are inappropriate, for example, through glances, facial expressions, and bodily movements, and this can occur at the same time as verbal expressions are being sent. The ping-pong model of interaction in the context of social media entails the interactor writing something (give expressions) before other interactors can in turn write back. There is very little opportunity for the parallel sending and transmission of expressions, and thus little or no opportunity for back-channel cues. First of all, this means that the one party must send out (write) too much before it becomes possible to make adjustments, and it may be that the border between front- and backstage has already been overstepped. In other words there are no mechanism in social media to correct wrongdoings while doing them.<sup>15</sup> Second, the efforts of others to make adjustments cannot occur until after the limits of what is deemed respectable and proper have already been overstepped, with the result that the person overstepping the border will likely lose face, and thus must choose between apology and defense, rather than between "will I say/write this?" and "will I not?". In the context of this discussion, the forms of interaction that are peculiar to social media lead, in theory, to a rapid escalation of conflict, thereby creating special conditions for what Goffman called "civil inattention". This refers to a situation in which two interactors who are unknown to one another act in such a way that they both see and do not see one another, for instance, when they meet on the sidewalk and scan one another to acknowledge each other's existence, and then shortly thereafter lower their gazes to demonstrate that the other person is not attracting anything other than absent-minded interest (which signifies that he or she is considered "normal"). Such interactions are wordless and require physical proximity, and it remains to be determined whether civil inattention can be exercised in social media and, if so, how. I would imagine that some distorted form of civil inattention occurs in social media through "silence," that is, one interactor choosing not to try to rectify transgressions of the border between front- and backstage. It is possible that such an attempt at informative silence could be interpreted as approval of the border transgression. This may be due in part to the fact that informative silence in f2f is never just silence, and the verbal silence is instead supported by expressions given off. The body is thus not silent when it is in

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<sup>15</sup> This could probably also explain malicious comments on the Internet.

physical proximity to other bodies. Nor is the body silent in social media, but there is no one else who can "hear" it, with the result that silence in p2p interaction probably not is an informative but an actual silence.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

To conclude, the communicative situation of the user in social media is paradoxical. On the one hand, the user has much greater opportunity to edit the expressions he or she sends out, because of the physical separation of the interactors, thereby enabling highly controlled self-presentations. In the physically proximate face-to-face interactions, it is possible to compare other people's self-presentations against the highly body-language-based social information that can be gathered about the person with whom one is interacting. Self-presentations are thus less vulnerable with the interactors separated in space. On the other hand, the risk appears to be greater that the user will send out overly unconsidered expressions, think out loud, say too much, and become indiscreet because he or she is unable to benefit from the expressions given off that we constantly receive from (and give to) the other people involved in face-to-face interaction. The amount of regulating social feedback decreases markedly in social media, thereby increasing the tendency to "overshare" information.

The difference between the communicative situation in interaction face to face and social media is a difference in the way expressions given and expressions given off have to be combined. Face to face these different kinds of expressions are intertwined because of the physical proximity of the interactors, while social media, in comparison, are characterized by oversharing of expressions given and undersharing of expressions given off.

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## LIFE AND CULTURE OF ARMENIANS IN IRAN

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### **Abstract**

The designation "Iranian Armenian community" already encompasses important social and anthropological presumptions and stances. The important impact of Armenians in spreading of innovation in socio-cultural and economic sphere as a religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minority in Iran is discussed by examining the characterization, multiple identity, history, and economic activities. In the field of arts, the achievements of the Iranian Armenian community were also speculated. The aim of this paper is to present the role and contribution of Armenians as a displaced minority community in the modernization process of Iran under the shade of historical analysis started from Safavid era, seventeenth century up to the recent times. New conjectures, suggesting the need for major revisions in well-established historical interpretations are elaborated. The need to develop new social, cultural, and anthropological paradigms in order to account for complex historical facts and their ideological reflections is also demonstrated both from the etic and emic perspectives. It is argued that the Iranian Armenian community has played a crucial role in the modernization process, not only in Iran, but also in the international scale, that has largely been underestimated or altogether neglected due to many internal and external causes. The ability to switch between different socio-cultural standards in the domain of role balancing, a trend belonging to disadvantage groups, and the option of role compartmentalization which usually is not open to them is argued in this paper.

**Keywords:** Armenian community; Diaspora; Iranian Armenian Community; Julfa, merchantalism; Safavid dynasty

## 1. Introduction

The designation "Iranian Armenian community" already encompasses important social and anthropological presumptions and stances. Iran, the name of the country implying specific territorial sovereignty has been used for the first part of the identity marking. Unlike "Persian Armenian" or "Armenian Persian" designations, which mark a conflict between two ethnic identities, the combination of "Iranian" and "Armenian" refers to the coupling of a polity to an ethnicity. Moreover, use of the term "community" instead of "minority", "ethnicity", "nationality", etc. invites the attention to the specific organization of the Iranian Armenians in social, cultural, economic, and cognitive dimensions. Communities are social entities that have more closeknit and informally organized network structures that are based on civil rather than political formations. In contemporary Iran, as well as throughout most of the history, the Persian language and culture has played double roles: ethnicity marking, as well as provision of a common vehicle for interethnic communication and interaction. It is the second role that has been dominant most of the time. The very existence of the Persian ethnicity is a subject of debate in contemporary Iran. The term "Fars" (in contemporary Farsi- the Persian language) refers more to geographic territory (the name of the county whose center is the historical city of Shiraz, known by its world famous poets Saadi and Hafez) where only a small part of the Persian ethnicity resides, than to an ethnic designation referring to the whole of Persian ethnicities. The designation "Irani" (Iranian), on the other hand, is often confused with Persian. The terms referring to Persian ethnicity are less problematic in minority languages. For example, the term "Parsik" in Armenian is clearly understood to refer to the Persian ethnicity. It can be concluded that the "melting pot" aspect of the Iranian society is emphasized and there is very high level of consciousness of the main function of Persian culture as a common culture for interpersonal communication in a multilingual and multicultural country like Iran, especially in the minds of the majority Persians. Persian culture can boast of historical richness and having played major role in the world cultural development. This is a source of pride for Persians as well as other ethnic groups in Iran. The consciousness of the importance of Persian language and culture, coupled with the tendency to avoid intercultural conflicts that may threaten the unity in the multinational country, a unity that will also continue to guarantee the dominant position of Persian, has come to so dominate public minds, that has driven the ethnic role of Persian language and culture to a subordinate and virtually forgotten position. Persians see no reason not to share the pride of belonging to an old linguistic and cultural tradition with other ethnicities in Iran and thus do not actively maintain the boundary between Persian and



other ethnicities. Boundary making is, however, being more actively pursued by minority groups that, no matter how much they take pride in being Iranian, also wish to maintain their own identities. The linguistic aspect of this analysis has been presented in (Nercissians, 1987:623-639) and (Nercissians, 1994:127-129). It has been shown that the role of Farsi as the national literary standard language has been subordinate to the role of Farsi as the formal language of the country and the common language with which all Iranians communicate. As a result, the development of standard Farsi has been influenced by those that have mostly learned that language not as a mother tongue, but a second language in a process of formal education (because of belonging to another ethnolinguistic group). Even the mother tongue Farsi speakers have not tried to standardize their own dialects and vernaculars. In contrast, the main role of modern Armenian standard language has been identity marking through becoming a vehicle via which national culture can be expressed in a way that Armenians can feel their own. This can explain why modern Persian has been developed in the middle of the medieval period after the Islamic conquest while the development of modern Armenian had to take place after the modernization process had become very strong. It can even explain why two, rather than one, standard literary Armenians were developed. I will not present any further elaboration of this important premise here. But the argument can be more clear-cut in the political sphere. The political history of postIslamic Iran has been mostly a history of Persianization of invading dynasts from (often foreign) non-Persian nationalities. Under the influence of Persian-speaking "vazir"s and court officials, or simply out of the desire to speak and identify with the more prestigious Persian by the king and other members of upper political hierarchy, the language of the invading dynasty would soon be replaced by Farsi in Iranian courts. It has been the cultural dominance of Persian, rather than political exclusions based on national and ethnic origins, that have maintained the ruling position for the Persians. National discriminations, whenever they have existed, have played only auxiliary roles. The exact opposite situation existed in the Ottoman Empire. The social hierarchy could only be maintained through a formalized system of religious and ethnic discrimination (The "millat" system). The prestige of Farsi was so great that it was often used in preference to Turkish in Ottoman courts too (and there was also the prestige of Arabic that drew upon religion). This explains why the policy to forge an Ottoman nation especially pursued by the "Young Turks" never succeeded. It can thus be seen why social conflicts assume national form in Turkey. In Iran, however, social movements tend to assume popular or democratic rather than ethnic or national character (Nercissians, 2003:17-8).

The analysis of the Iranian Armenian community and its role in the modernization process of the country presupposes some familiarity with the history of the region. It is not our purpose

here to present the historical facts and narrations; rather, we are going to suggest interpretations and theoretical explications. This, it ought to be pointed out, has the task of presenting aspects of the Iranian Armenian history especially its impact that has largely been underestimated or neglected. There are several reasons for this failure by historiography. Studies on Iranian history, Iranian culture and art, or Iranian social and anthropological issues have too often confined their scope of study to the dominant groups and not considered minority cultures as part of their subject matter. The tendency to confuse Iranian history and culture with Persian history and culture has also contributed to the lack of attention to other ethnicities. Consideration of the Iranian Armenian community as part of the bigger Armenian nation, whose history is related to the history of Iran only inasmuch as there are mutual influences between Armenian and Persian cultures also aggravates the situation. On the other hand, studies that have problematized Armenian history and culture in general, have tended to consider the Iranian Armenian community as a small and often exterritorial section of their subject matter. Again, the role of the Iranian Armenians has been considered of interest only insofar as it has been able to influence cultural and sociopolitical developments in mainland Armenia. Finally, historical studies with an international scope have also failed to pay attention to the role of the Iranian Armenians because modernization has largely been equated to Westernization. Therefore, the only role Iranian Armenians could have played ought to have been through becoming an agent (because of their common Christian faith, their wider ties through trade and through contacts with Armenian communities in the West, etc.) for the spread of Western influence in the Orient. Even the contemporary Iranian Armenian community has little historical memory of its glorious past. The once influential Khojas that could challenge the might of Western Imperial powers are no longer present and their cosmopolitan views were not in line with the nationalistic views of contemporary community leaders. In other words, the wealthy Armenian traders, who led the community in former times, do not possess the desired qualifications for becoming the role models that contemporary elites wish to furnish to the community rank and file. So a major revision of the prevailing beliefs and ideological attitudes is called for.

## **2. Community Characterization**

Iranian Armenians form a small but still largely influential section of the larger Iranian society. Armenians are considered a religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minority in the

country. They are highly urbanized and relatively well off; though they suffer from diminished sense of belonging due to their urbanized life, minority status, nationalistic feelings, and sense of historical injustice to which Armenians have been collectively fell victim. The majority of the community members belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church. There is smaller number of Armenians belonging to other Christian denominations. Intermarriages between Armenians and Iranian or foreign citizens have become more common due to high levels of urbanization and integration as well as travels and migrations. But most of those intermarriages result in assimilation into other ethnicities and cutting of ties with their community of original belonging. There is also a rather high level of emigration. The community size, as a result, is declining. The relation of the community to the world Armenian population is, likewise, that of a small and insignificant section to a bigger entity. The dialects spoken by Iranian Armenians are very close to the dialects and the standard Armenian language spoken in the Republic of Armenia. But there also exists a collection of Armenian communities in other countries where the spoken Armenian dialects follow a different standard: Western Armenian. The latter had been the standard Armenian in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian communities worldwide, with the exception of the Iranian Armenian and a few other communities the majority of whose populations are not recent immigrants have been formed as a result of the 1915 Genocide in the Ottoman country. That event has been the cause of the formation of what is now designated as the Armenian diaspora, which accounts for more than half of the total Armenian population (the total number as well as the ratio depending on how being an Armenian is defined). This fact has contributed to the collective sense of injustice and prevalence of strong nationalistic attitudes among all Armenians; independent of how directly or indirectly they were victims or descendants of the genocide. During the Cold War era, the Iranian Armenian community, notwithstanding its closer historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographical ties with mainland Armenia, came to become more closely aligned to, and known to be part of the diaspora. The fall of the Soviet Union and the formation of the independent Republic of Armenia have resulted in resumption of extensive contacts. But the consideration of the Iranian Armenian community as part of the Armenian diaspora has continued to prevail. History, however, shows that the southern part of the Iranian Armenian community: the Parish centered in Esfahan, the one time capital of the Safavid dynasty, has been formed by a similar forced migration resulting in sizeable loss of lives during the reign of Shah Abbas. Centuries of living in Iran has resulted in a strong sense of belonging; paradoxically, stronger than the rest of the Iranian Armenian community that has never experienced the horrors of being forced to migrate and live amid foreign, sometimes hostile, and completely unfamiliar land and people. But any

mention of migratory origin will surely be refuted by the northern part of the Iranian Armenian community, who will point out their aboriginal status in Iran. Although the subcommunity centered in Esfahan (mainly descendants of those that have migrated during the reign of Shah Abbas) and the subcommunity centered in Iranian Azarbaijan (the natives) constitute the two major components of the Iranian Armenian community, there are other smaller components too. Those that have immigrated from the Ottoman Empire after the massacres, those that have immigrated or expelled from Soviet Union, and the Armenian gypsies (Boshas) can, for example, be mentioned. The migration of all the segments of the Iranian Armenian community to Tehran has been another factor in the further integration of those subcommunities. Regarding the diasporical character of the Iranian Armenian community too, history cannot give its confirmation. Throughout history, mainland Armenia has been more often a part of Iran than an independent country. Changes of boundary have constantly changed the character of the Iranian Armenian community. Sometimes Iranian Armenians have constituted territorially concentrated national minority groups governed by autonomous local rulers or satraps. In other times, they have constituted an ethnic group diffused throughout the country that functions as cultural agents facilitating ties between Iran and Armenia. Such a dramatic change happened as a result of the Irano-Russian wars in early nineteenth century that resulted in final defeat for Iran and treaties that ceded the northwestern part of Iran to Russia and extraterritorial rights and population movements. This was the first step towards the cutting of the ties between the Armenians still living in Iran and those Armenians who, through reverse migration or territorial changes, ceased being Iranian citizens. The Soviet revolution and the Cold War in the twentieth century completed this process resulting in the contemporary status for the Iranian Armenian community. A status, reinforced by the movement of the capital to Tehran shortly before the Irano-Russian wars, and high rates of migration among Iranian Armenians from rural to urban areas and from provinces to the capital during the two centuries that resulted in depopulation of the Armenian villages and ethnic quarters in the provincial cities. Cordial Irano-Soviet relations were considered extremely dangerous by the West. It is clear that the capacity of the Iranian Armenian community to act as an agent for the development of such relations had to be curtailed through any means. Even the religious ties were considered too dangerous to be allowed to continue. Iran was to stay in the Western sphere of influence by all means and any cultural contact, no matter how innocent and nonpolitical had to be suppressed. Iranian Armenians should forget their cultural history, especially their role in resisting colonialism, and become integrated in the Western Armenian diaspora resenting Soviet dominance in Armenia and welcoming Western influences and

attitudes. Armenian nationalism, by contrast, after purging its anticolonial elements, was most desirable and could easily be employed against the communist internationalism.

### 3. Multiple Identities

An important angle for understanding how being a member of a minority group is being felt and handled by an Iranian Armenian is the way possible conflicts between norms and reference models are being resolved in different situations and domains. Existence of different, mutually exclusive standards of conduct is not necessarily a problem only for ethnic minorities. For example, one is supposed to behave very differently in formal interactions than the typical modes of behavior in less formal and more intimate contacts. The ability to know what actions are deemed suitable or improper in any situation constitutes an important part of one's social consciousness. Such a situation is referred to by linguists as diglossia. Charles Ferguson is credited with first using the concept (Ferguson, 1959:325-337). Very briefly, diglossic speech communities have a High variety (H) that is very prestigious and a Low variety (L) with no official status which are in complementary distribution with each other, for instance the High variety might be used for literary discourse and the Low variety for ordinary conversation. One point that Ferguson insisted on was a distinction between diglossia and the more common dialect-standard dichotomy, the difference being that while in the latter situation there are people who actually speak the standard variety; under diglossia no one speaks H colloquially. In other words, there are two complementary standards. Domains of use are compartmentalized, so that under some circumstances the usage of H is more appropriate, while under other circumstances it is the use of L that is considered to be more proper. The varieties differ not only in grammar, phonology, and vocabulary, but also with respect to function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, and stability. L is typically acquired at home as a mother tongue and continues to be so used later on. Its main uses are familial and familiar. H, on the other hand, is learned through a process of formal education and never at home, and is related to institutions outside the home. The separate domains in which H and L are acquired provide them with separate systems of support. Further research on diglossia has focused on a number of important issues: function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, phonology, extent of distribution in space, time, and in various language families, and finally what engenders diglossia and what conditions favor its development. The sustainability of the diglossic situation remains

guaranteed as long as the compartmentalization of domains, situations, or functions that keep the L variety a vernacular mother tongue that continues to be learned at home because that is the proper variety to be spoken at home domain; and endows the H variety with higher prestige so that it will later be acquired via schooling because L is considered inappropriate for "educated" discourses, remains unchallenged. The notion that diglossia could also be used to characterize other multilingual situations where the H and L varieties were not genetically related, was developed by Fishman (Fishman, 1967:29-38). He argues that the relationship between individual bilingualism and societal diglossia is not a necessary or causal one. There is a) both, diglossia and bilingualism, b) diglossia without bilingualism, c) bilingualism without diglossia and d) neither diglossia nor bilingualism. It is widely accepted that multilingual societies having both diglossia and bilingualism are the most stable for all languages involved. The case of the Iranian Armenian community has been investigated (Nercissians, 1985:73-80), (Nercissians, 1997:47-80) and (Nercissians, 2001:59-70). It is the problematic concept of selfhood and the related technologies; however that constitute our main concern. To discuss that broader aspect for the Iranian Armenian community, it is on the one hand necessary to extend the simple diglossia model in linguistics; and on the other hand develop similar models for characterizing multiplicity of modes and norms of appropriateness in other spheres as well. It is not enough to state that as long as certain attitudes of appropriateness continue to exist diglossia will prevail. One needs to go a step further and explain how those attitudes are generated and maintained and why the less prestigious L variety continues to be considered appropriate in corresponding domains. A two dimensional approach to the scientific conceptualization of diglossia suggests that the standards are compared along different axis. The prestige or status dimension gives rise to an overt standard that is formed from above, while the solidarity or identity dimension also leads to a covert standard formed from below. The first standard is proper in domains that are more formal, and therefore does not include the intimate and family domains, and is thus superposed, that is, acquired through schooling (Nercissians, 1988: 55-69). Going another step beyond the simple unilateral model of diglossia occurs with the recognition that it is not necessarily access to the H variety that could distinguish upper and lower classes. A more important and subtle exclusion can result from differential ability to compartmentalize. It has been argued that the ability to compartmentalize the domains, and freely switch between different standards is an index of social dominance (Individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups do not find the option of role compartmentalization open to them. Instead, they must constantly engage in role balancing never fully achieving the expectation level in any of the conflicting dimension (Ritzer,

1988:437-8) and (Nercissians, 2001:59-70). This extended model can be as easily applied to the spheres of cultures, social norms, and identities (Nercissians, 1988:55-67), (Nercissians, 1992) and (Nercissians, 2001:59-70). Studies carried out for the case of Iranian Armenians confirm the existence of bilingualism, biculturalism, diglossia, dinomia, and generally multiple identities with compartmentalization along ethnically determined domain boundaries (diethnia). Identity crisis is generally a main feature of life in Iran. There has always been sizeable emigration from the country; increasing in scale during times of economic hardship, but not diminishing even in times of prosperity. One needs to constantly justify, to himself, and to others, his chosen identity. Given the importance of solidarity oriented ideologies for small ethnic communities, collective identity construction is a major engagement for which all occasions are taken and much energy is spent (Nercissians, 1999) and (Nercissians, 2003:17-8). The "outdoor" self, in the street, workplace, and generally in wider Iranian society, is characterized by its specific norms of appropriateness, which is different from the "indoor" community norms, to become the model in home and other communal domains. The extent this compartmentalization capability is available to the different social classes in Iranian Armenian community, and the detailed historical path from monolingualism and monoculturalism to asymmetric bilingualism and biculturalism; and from role balancing to advanced state of diglossia and dinomia for the Iranian Armenians is a subject for further research. But comparison with other minorities show that the small and closeknit Armenian community in Iran has already passed a long way in this direction (Nercissians 2001: 59-70).

#### **4. History**

The historical relationship between ethnicities that lived in the lands where Persians and Armenians live now, among many other ethnicities, goes back to the days of the Kingdom of Urartu and beyond; when the two ethnicities had yet not been forged. Throughout most of the ancient period, Iran had more influence on Armenia's culture than any of its other neighbours. Intermarriage among the Persian and Armenian nobility was common. The two ethnicities shared many religious, political, and linguistic elements and traditions and, at times, even shared the same dynasty. The rise of the Sasanid dynasty to power in Iran with its assimilatory policies and the Armenian conversion to Christianity, in the fourth century, however, alienated the Armenians from Zoroastrian Iran and oriented them toward the West. A broader analysis can reveal that the geopolitical situation of the Armenian homeland, bridging the Orient to the

West, entails three important consequences. Firstly, most trade routes pass through this region. Secondly, the social system will be affected both by Asiatic mode of production characterized with virtual absence of landed property, high autonomy of urban and rural communities, and political absolutism; as well as by Western succession of ancient and feudal systems. Thirdly, and most importantly, the country will always be the arena for imperial wars between Eastern and Western powers. During the Arshakid period, where a branch of the same dynasty ruled in Armenia most of the time, the Armenian ruling hierarchy favored continuous alliance with Iran and viewed the Roman power centralization tendencies the most threatening. However, the advent of medievalism, coupled with adoption of Zoroastrianism in Iran and Christianity in Armenia and Rome, reversed those sentiments. Even after the fall of the Sassanid Empire and invasion of Iran by successive non-Persian dynasts, the rivalry between Oriental and Occidental Empires continued and successive wars continued to devastate the Armenian homeland. This duality finds its reflection in all aspects of the Armenian history as well as the epic, even mythical reproductions of Armenian heroes' struggles. These narrations always have "davacans" (traitors) alongside the heroes. Every story gives rise to a discussion: who was right? The idealist hero or the pragmatist "davacan"? The epic of Vartan, the Armenian hero who stood against the assimilatory pressures of the Sassanid despot Shahpour, is a good example. So great has been the place of this story in the Armenian historical memory that Vartan has been elevated to sainthood in older times, and has become one of the most important symbols of the Armenian nationalism in modern times. The role of the traitor is played by another Armenian nobleman, Vasak; from the House of Siunik. He seems to be less concerned with preservation of Christianity or fighting against any foreign invader than taking advantage of the fall of the Arshacid dynasty in Armenia and achieving some kind of self rule. He is ready to fight against Iran if necessary, but also to assume a subordinate position with respect to the Iranian thorn and fight against his fellow Armenians if that proves to be more expedient. The epic perhaps occupies such a high position in the collective minds of the Armenians because it is such a central and recurring issue in the history of the Armenian people. It is also typical of a longer cycle of Armenian Epics, which has been designated by Abeghian as the "Persian War" epic (Abeghian, 1899). The war was also reminiscent of another major historical event: The Irano-Ottoman war fought by Shah Abbas, in late medieval era during which the forced migration of Armenians to Esfahan and other cities and villages deep inside Iran occurred. History has not registered the future fate of the migrants and whether an Armenian community has existed in interior Iranian cities or villages for any long period during the Sassanid era. However, there is ample evidence of other forced migrations during



the time span between the two events (Aprahamian, 1964:108). Besides forced migrations, there were also voluntary emigrations to different flourishing urban centers both in Iran and elsewhere by Armenians that reached very massive proportions during the middle and late medieval times. For example, emigration to Cilicia had been so massive and continued for so long as to support the formation of a very strong and long lived Armenian state outside mainland Armenia. Generally, although the contemporary Armenian diaspora has mainly been formed as a result of the Ottoman massacres in late nineteenth century and the 1915 genocide, but that has been superposed on an already existing diaspora that was fairly large and active, and had continued its existence, with periodical declines and renewals, and waves of new migrations throughout centuries. Concerning the existence of Iranian Armenian communities in areas of Iran not immediately adjacent to the Armenian homeland, recent findings in Sultanieh, the Iranian capital during the Mongul rule, attests to the prior existence of an active community long before the Safavid rule. It should be remembered that Armenians both in mainland Armenia and in Cilicia had very intensive economic and political ties with the Monguls. It can be conjectured that other Armenian communities, and especially the one centered in Sultanieh, were also involved in the promotion of East West trade made possible under the Mongol rule. To this, we may add evidence attesting to the very active presence of Armenians in virtually all important mongolian cities (Bedrosian, 1979:85). Returning to the Iranian Armenian community during those times, the importance of the Armenian community in the northwest of Iran should also be emphasized. Armenians, as already have been mentioned, have been native inhabitants in parts of Iran directly adjacent to mainland Armenia. During the times Iran has ruled the whole of Armenia, this whole area can be viewed as a continuum. In other times, the Armenians living in the northwestern part of Iran constitute a separate entity that becomes more integrated with the Iranian Armenian community in Iran's interior parts than with the mainland Armenians. But even that is not an absolute rule considering the difficulties of intercountry contacts and the extent of cross border communications. The cultural achievements of the Armenians in the northwest of Iran during the late medieval era have been considerable. Mkhitar of Her, for example, has been credited for theorizing about infectious diseases when no idea of microbial agents of infection was present in the field of medicine. In his encyclopedic work on fevers, he discussed psychotherapy, surgery, the use of silk thread to close wounds, diet and herbs to cure diseases (Hacikyan & et al., 2002:111). Even in Esfahan, there was a small Armenian community already there before the forced migration of Shah Abbas. Armenia was again an arena for interdynastic wars in the period between the fall of the Mongolian empire and the rise of the Ottoman and Safavid states. The latter Empires continued

that war even more fiercely. It was because of that devastation that some Armenian notables preferred the security of the Persian capital. In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century Armenia was still divided into many small-scale principalities. However, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, most of the Armenian homeland was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. A large number of Armenians continued to migrate from their devastated lands to Crimea, to Russia, to Poland, to India. As Constantinople became a thriving center of the Ottoman Empire, its Armenian community increased considerably. In early seventeenth century, Shah Abbas I of Persia launched an attack on Ottoman lands, conquered Tabriz, and continued the attack to seize Marand, Nakhichevan, Ordubad, Akulis and Yerevan. From Constantinople, new forces were sent to fight against the Persians. Because of this, Shah Abbas ordered the Armenians to abandon their homes to forego a long and dangerous journey so as to be resettled in distant lands. To enforce his ruling, the Shah commanded his men to burn down the Armenian homes. The entire population was forced to march towards Iran. On their way, the Armenians encountered many obstacles. They had to cross the Araks River. Only the fortunate few successfully made it to the opposite side. The rest died as their bodies floated on the waves of the Araks. It is estimated that between 1604 and 1605 some 250,000 to 300,000 Armenians were removed from the area. Most of the Armenians were eventually settled in Iranian Azerbaijan, where other Armenians had settled earlier. Some ended up in the Guilan and Mazandaran region and in the cities of Sultanieh, Qazvin, Mashhad, Hamadan, Arak, and Shiraz. The wealthy Armenians of Julfa were brought to the Safavid capital of Esfahan. The Julfa community, known for its affluent traders and support of Shah Abbas was accorded special favors and seems to have suffered during the migration. They were settled across the banks of the Zayandeh Rud and a town, called New Julfa, was constructed especially for them. Can we compare this forced migration, which, no doubt, resulted in many deaths, and was carried out, according to eyewitness testimony, most ruthlessly, to the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman lands? The Armenian collective memory seems to have decided negatively. So favorable is the personality of Shah Abbas viewed that several Armenian schools, even today, are named after him. This is paradoxical. Shah Abbas is known in Iranian history as a ruthless tyrant. Although he is credited to have set the way towards glory in Iran, his despotic ways are also said to carry the seeds of the final destruction of the Safavid Empire. Armenians certainly were major victims of his tyrannical policies. Their victimization did not stop after the forced migration waves and continued long after their settlement in foreign lands. To be sure, he did many favors to Armenians as well. Though the favors mostly benefited the upper strata of the Armenians. History is, of course, largely written from the viewpoint of the upper class. But

there may be other reasons why Armenians view him, in general, favorably. The prosperity of the country especially benefited the Armenians. That includes also native Armenians in northwestern part of Iran and in mainland Armenia. The economic boom was long and lasting. Having already settled many Armenians in the Caspian coast, where the best silk in Persia was produced, Shah Abbas decided to take advantage of their experience as traders. The ineptitude of the state appointed silk traders induced the Shah to transfer it to the Armenians, whom he correctly foresaw would have the advantage in having close ties with Armenian communities in Europe. He gave them bales of silk on credit to sell abroad, for which they had to pay on return, allowing them to keep any profit that they could make. Armenians had rights which were denied other minorities. They elected their own mayor, rang church bells, had public religious processions, established their own courts, and had no restrictions on clothing or the production of wine. A small republic was built in the Armenian quarters of the capital. The Armenian mayor was given one of the shah's royal seals in order to bypass the official bureaucracy and the medieval hindrances, and had jurisdiction over the Armenian villages around Esfahan. He collected and paid to the king a poll tax in gold. Soon, the Armenian population of New Julfa and the surrounding villages grew to some 50,000. Sources describe the fabulous houses of the affluent Armenians in New Julfa, decorated with Oriental and Western artwork, with tables set with silver and gold utensils. Ottoman profits from overseas trade fell and Iran became a center of international trade. One of the important benefits of Armenian economic power in Iran was the transformation of the Armenian self-image. After centuries of repression by foreign invaders, Armenians were granted equal and at times even greater privileges than ordinary citizens of the Empire. This increased prestige extended to the Church as well, and enabled the leaders at Etchmiadzin, The Armenian Holy See, to regain some control over outlying dioceses and communities and to establish ties with the patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem. The increased prestige and granted advantages also allowed a number of Armenian secular leaders to achieve recognition and to rally support. This was particularly true of the noble landowners of Karabagh and Zangezur who, under the patronage of the shahs, the Church, and the Armenian merchants, retained and expanded their ancestral fiefdoms. The boom lasted till the fall of the Safavid dynasty. In 1722 a small body of Afghan tribesmen won a series of easy victories before entering and taking the capital itself, ending Safavid rule. A period of anarchy and a struggle for supremacy among Afshar, Qajar, Afghan, and Zand tribal chieftains devastated the economy and was made life unbearable especially for the Armenian community in New Julfa. Many emigrated to India, Russia, Europe, and many other countries especially where Armenian communities that could support continuation of

trade activities already existed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Armenian community centered in Esfahan continued to play a leading role in the Armenian diaspora through ties with extraterritorial community members who found ample grounds for sustained economic and cultural development in those other countries never weakening the contact with New Julfa. But the situation in the center itself continued to decline. Finally, the epicenter of the Armenians' economic and cultural development started shifting towards the Ottoman Empire, and later to Russia. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Armenian community in Esfahan had completely lost its leading role and with the loss of mainland Armenia to the Russian Empire, the advent of Tehran, the new capital of Iran, as the main cultural and economic center of the country, and the isolation of Iran in the international arena, both the northern and the southern sections of the Iranian Armenian community had lost all their significance internationally, in terms of their ability to have any impact upon other Armenian communities in other countries, and even in terms of their impact in Iran. The Armenian community in Tehran, on the other hand, was continuously increasing in size, and becoming an important force in Iran's renovation. The stabilization of the political situation in Iran due to the ascent of the Qajar dynasty at the beginning of the nineteenth century and reunification of Iran put a stop to the rapid dissolution of the country's fabric. The situation started to improve for the Iranian Armenian community. Soon it regained its importance in the Iranian civil setting. However, its capability to exert strong influence on other countries and communities was irreversibly gone. This mainly reflected the fact that Iran was quickly becoming a virtual colony. Although it never became a direct colony of any Western state, its politics was clearly being manipulated by European Colonial powers especially England and Russia.

## **5. Trade**

The strategic geographical location of Armenia between Asia and Europe has predetermined, in a great degree, the character of the country's main economic activity. Armenia's involvement in the international trade since the ancient era was primarily stipulated by this factor. The constant wars and population movements leading to the establishment of thriving Armenian diaspora also facilitated the role of Armenians in the East West trade. In the post-Islamic period, the establishment of independent Armenian statehood in Armenia and later in Cilicia witnessed a renaissance in trade, art, architecture, translations, church and secular

literature, and scientific studies. The fall of the Armenian kingdoms and the defeat of the Byzantines by the Seljuks at the battle of Manzikert in Armenia brought the country under Seljuk rule. The devastating Mongol invasion soon followed. However, the Armenian elites eventually prospered under the Mongols, serving as agents and engaging in international trade via the newly secured routes through Central Asia to India and China. Moreover, friendly relations developed between the Mongols and the Armenian nobility in Cilicia as well as in mainland Armenia. This led to the establishment of Armenian communities in Iran and in other lands under Mongol rule. Sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were the golden ages of the Armenian commercial capital. In this period Armenian merchants, in fact, did not have any competitors on caravan routes passing through lands where medieval rulers exerted local power. Meanwhile, with their own ships Armenian merchants were also involved in international maritime trade throughout the warm seas. After the establishment of the Armenian community in New Julfa, and the granting of trading privileges and a monopoly on the silk trade to the Armenian merchants, the community was transformed into a rich and influential one and the city into a main center of trade between Iran and Europe. Interest-free loans were granted to the Armenians to start businesses and light industries. Soon a major part of Iran's trade with Europe, Russia, and India was handled by the Armenians with the shah's protection. Soon they had outbid the British on the silk monopoly. The New Julfa merchants formed trading companies which competed with the Levant, East India, and Muscovy companies, and established businesses in Kabul, Herat, Qandahar, Marseilles, Venice, Genoa, Moscow, and Amsterdam, and in cities of Sweden, Poland, Germany, India, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The Iranian kings used to visit New Julfa and be entertained at the houses of the most successful merchants, known as *khojas*, whom the silk monopoly had made extremely rich. The exercise of the silk monopoly proved to be profitable to both parties. The Armenians acquired a reputation for diligence and thrift, and the trade provided the necessary capital for the development of a complex ethnically based network stretching from the Far East to Europe, with Julfa at the centre. There were merchants in Tonkin, Siam, Java and the Philippines, and in many towns in India, and among the commodities shipped from the East to Persia were cotton goods, musk, spices, and Chinese porcelain. Most commodities were exported from Persia overland through Tabriz, Erzerum, and Aleppo to Smyrna, where they were shipped across the Mediterranean to Venice, Leghorn, Marseilles, or other ports. In Europe they sold by the same ethnic network of merchants in Holland, France, England, Italy, Germany, Poland, and Sweden, and Armenians from Julfa are recorded as far away as Spain. An alternative overland route was developed through Russia to the North Sea, from Tabriz to

Nosava, across the Caspian Sea, to Astrakhan, Moscow, and Archangel, from whence it continued to Holland, Stockholm, and England (Carswell, 1968:73). The term "trade diaspora" was coined by Abner Cohen to refer to a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities (Cohen, 1971:266-281). His later theorization led to the distinction between a trade diaspora and a victim diaspora. The latter could, in time be converted to the former. Similarly, the concept of trade network was posited by Markovits to designate a trade network is that consists of a nodal center and a cluster of dispersed points around it, connected both to each other and to the center (Markovits, 2003:249). These points or stations are connected to each other and to the center through what Markovits calls the "circulation of men and things". At least five circulations, according to the theory, are involved: a) merchants, b) credit, c) goods, d) information (on market conditions, trade secrets, etc.) and e) women. The latter two circulate exclusively within the network while others circulate in other coexisting networks as well. Both definitions are true for the Armenian trade community. Their intermarriage, ethnic contacts, common cultural background, craving for education and knowledge, etc. were all important factors. Three main reasons cited for their success were the social capital characterized by very high level of mutual trust and institutions that oversaw trade ethics; the incredibly rapid propagation of information (Some of the major family firms in Julfa had their own corps of shatters: runner-messengers who delivered mail across very long distances) and command of business and general knowledge; and use of a most efficient financial credit system that was far ahead of their times (Aslanian, 2004:37-100). The expansion of trade activities in India and the Far East happened at the same time that European colonialism supported by the full military and political might of the corresponding states was increasingly being extended within the same geographic space. Not only did all attempt by the big European powers to outperform the Iranian Armenian community, even during the worst period of the decline of the latter, prove unsuccessful, but the expansion of the latter into spheres of influence of the mightiest colonial powers was taking place despite the fiercest resistance, employment of the full military power, influence of the diplomatic and religious and missionary institutions, even direct piracy and breaking their own laws by Western states and rising economic entities like the East India Company. (Bhattacharya, 2005:277) and (Aslanian, 2004:37-100). By the 17th and 18th centuries, Armenian merchant-trading communities had successfully expanded themselves from their center in Esfahan to Portuguese Goa (India), English Calcutta, pre-colonial Myanmar and the ports of Java and the Malay Peninsula (particularly Malacca), the Spanish Philippines and colonized Ceylon (Sri Lanka), among many other emerging trade centers. The mercantile European East Indian trading companies and

colonial authorities viewed The Armenian trading communities as their most formidable enemies in late 18th century. When they could not outwit and outgun their Armenian rivals, they decided to join them by concluding treaties that would gradually replace rivalry and war with mutual cooperation that would bring about mutual benefit. Not only did the Iranian Armenian notables embark on international missions and journeys as envoys and ambassadors of Iran in European courts, and conversely, as envoys representing European countries in Iranian courts, and conclude treaties of great international significance, but they also concluded treaties with the greatest Western Imperial powers, including Russia and Great Britain; not once, but on several occasions, on behalf of their own. It is, perhaps, a unique case in modern international history where a small and stateless community can deal single handedly with strong Imperial forces. To compete against their might, the community had to take full advantage of whatever alternative means of exerting power, civil societies could furnish. The Iranian Armenian community developed very efficient postal system, high social capital, most effective credit system, as well as strong institutions for dissemination of information, knowledge creation, and cultural development. Furthermore, it secured the active support of the state institutions of their host societies in defense of their transnational interests. By late nineteenth century, however, active rivalry with the West had all but ended. The economic as well as direct military wars fought by the Armenians against the French, Russians, and especially against the British in India and elsewhere had become a thing of the past. Security in Iran had once again been established. The West had found it more beneficial to utilize the Armenian nationalism in pursuance of its own interests. Armenian communities outside Iran were becoming stronger and ties with the Iranian Armenian community were breaking. The mercantile age had been replaced by the industrial era. Iran was increasingly becoming economically dependent upon the West. The glory of the Merchant community centered in Esfahan had thus come to an end.

## **6. Culture and Arts**

The Iranian Armenian community could already boast of important cultural achievements before the forced migration at the time of Shah Abbas. The return of the Armenian religious center to Eastern Armenia during the reign of Ghara Ghoyunlus, a dynasty that ruled the northwestern part of Iran after the fall of Mongols but before the advent of the Safavids, reflected the gradual shift of the epicenter of the Armenian culture to the East. As soon as the

community in Esfahan was established, a medieval university was found alongside the religious center in the city, where the next generation of the Armenian cultural elites, who were to lead not only the community in Esfahan, but also other Armenian communities in Iran and elsewhere, were educated. The establishment of a printing house not too long after its discovery by Guttenberg, by a victim community that has only recently been established, is a unique event in the history of the Middle East. As trade became the major source for the prosperity of the community, a secular school with a curriculum that could be considered the medieval equivalent of MBA was also established in New Julfa. Between the mid-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Perso-Indian community of Armenians had bankrolled the nascent craft of Armenian printing industry in many cities in Europe, the Middle East, and India. The books that were published in those printing houses were so numerous had so high circulation that make contemporary researchers wonder how such a high readership was obtainable in those days. The community had also patronized Catholic missionaries in Iran and other countries and assisted in the formation of a community of Armenian Catholics, known as the Mekhitarist Order, whose linguistic and literary activities left a major impact on the development of Armenian culture. This same Perso-Indian community had financed the establishment of schools of higher education in Venice, Paris, New Julfa, Moscow, and Calcutta some of which continue to function even today. In the field of arts, the achievements of the Iranian Armenian community were also spectacular. I have argued elsewhere (Nercissians, 2007:20-2) that in some domains like painting, the conceptualization of the modernization process in Iranian arts needs to be seriously revised, considering the art history of the Armenian community in Esfahan. The transitional period from manuscript illumination to canvas painting, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has not been adequately analyzed by the Art historians. Frescoes, painted altar curtains, ceramics, and canvas paintings are still preserved in churches and the homes of the wealthy in New Julfa. A transition from conventional medieval forms to new realistic forms and means of expression was made during this period. Parallel to miniatures and murals, new forms and genres of art developed: easel painting, portraiture, life scenes from daily experiences of ordinary people, and landscape painting. Among artists we know by name are Minas, a legendary painter of New Julfa in Iran, and Ter Stepanos, also from New Julfa, responsible for both manuscript illuminations from the mid-seventeenth century as well as large paintings in the Cathedral of New Julfa. Better known among the native segment of the Iranian Armenian community, are the members of the Hovanatanian family, whose frescoes grace the walls of eastern Armenia churches and whose portraits of upperclass Armenians are the pride of museums in Erevan and Tiflis. Hakob



Hovnatanian, a member of that family, created highly professional portraits of his contemporaries which are prominent for their profound psychological expressiveness. The beginning of the modernization process in Iranian painting should be dated back for more than a century, considering the works of those Artists and others like Hovannes Mrkuz and Bogdan Saltanov. The wealthy merchants, artisans, and generally, the elites in the Iranian Armenian community were the main consumers of that new type of art. No longer did the painters need the patronage of the king or the noblemen or clergy. The merchants of New Julfa and other cities in Iran eventually had to give way to newer representatives of capital. But the Iranian Armenians never stopped to be agents of modernization in Iran especially in the sphere of fine arts. From architecture to music, theatre, and other art domains, Iranian Armenians were always part of the vanguard. Their high level of urbanization, increased international contact, ethnic ties with other Armenian communities, and fine integration in larger Iranian society provided them with the prerequisites for playing that role. Their contribution is also highly appreciated by their Iranian compatriots of different ethnicity.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

In her study of the role of Iranian Armenians in the constitutional revolution of Iran, Berberian starts with the following remarks (Berberian, 2005:279-296). "Nationalist historiography has viewed Iranian-Armenian identity as exclusively and unchangingly Armenian, with little if any multiplicity. Nationalist Armenian historiography has presented Iranian-Armenians as foremost and primarily Armenian with only secondary, and therefore, less significant, attachments to Iran. In a similar manner, nationalist Iranian historiography has dealt with the Iranian-Armenians as an ethnically and religiously different minority and has neglected to recognize their role in the formation of Iranian national identity. By placing the focus on a Perso-Muslim identity of Iran, it has for the most part failed to acknowledge minority, in this case Armenian, perspectives and identities not because they necessarily opposed Iranian nationalist ideals, but because they challenged along with other Iranians an exclusive, homogeneous concept of Iran". To this observation, I can add the dominant ideology of the industrial era: the nation-state paradigm, which has influenced also international historiography; and even the collective historical memory of the Iranian Armenian community itself. To refute the single identity view, Berberian analyzes the well documented and very active involvement of the Iranian Armenian community, and especially its intellectuals, in the

most important social movement of the country at the beginning of the twentieth century. It can be said that far from being unconcerned or alienated, the Iranian Armenians were in vanguard position in the process of forging the modern Iranian identity, actively engaged and playing leading roles not only in cultural sphere, but also in the sociopolitical sphere of revolutionary action. The examination of the role of Armenians in the constitutional revolution in Iran shows that many of the leading intellectuals went beyond diethnia in their outlooks, and were inspired by internationalistic and humanistic concerns. Although the roots of the Armenian nationalism can be traced back to eras long before the advent of the modern era, it became dominant ideology gradually from nineteenth century and especially during the twentieth century. History books examine, in great detail, the attempts by intellectual leaders like Israel Ori to instigate Armenian "national liberation movement" with the help of the West, and the actual liberation movement that took place in Gharabagh, where the Armenian landed aristocracy still existed, led by David Beg. The trading communities of Agoulis and other cross boundary cities, who opposed that movement are considered traitors (davacans) again. Nationalistic historiography laments the prevailing diversity in the Armenians' sociopolitical attitudes and stances. If only all Armenians would adhere to (their own particular brand of) nationalism! But the majority opinion in the Iranian Armenian community, even when the central power in Iran had collapsed and they were threatened with the constant harassment and repressions by different Iranian warlords, and then with occupation and possible massacres by Ottoman invaders, was less concerned with the ethnic belonging of the political power, and more interested in the extent that central power could guarantee safety for their lives and properties, and oversee economic prosperity. To be sure, medieval governments especially in the Orient were all despotic. And all pretexts, including ethnic and religious differences could become excuses for repressions. But it made no sense to be solely concerned with the ethnic factor. The ethnic element in the Ottoman Empire might have been very important, because it was the main underlying factor for sustaining the dominance of the Ottoman rulers. The situation was very different in Iran. The dominant Persian ethnicity, during the course of pre-modern and modern history, seldom enjoyed political dominance as well. Iran was ruled, most of the time, by nomadic dynasts that did not belong to the Persian ethnicity. It was the cultural dominance of the Persians that ensured the successive Persianization of the courts of foreign invaders. Like their Persian compatriots, the Iranian Armenians were not afraid of cultural competition. As long as they could rely upon their cultural knowledge and ability to engage in productive economic activity, they knew that they would eventually outwit the invading rulers. Only the triumph of Western Imperialism, and the cultural subordination of the Orient could pave the

way for the nationalistic ideology. One can contrast the profile of Israel Ori, prototypical for the nationalistic aspirations, with that of Philippe de Zagly, an Iranian Armenian known also as Emamgholi Beg. The latter is a forgotten figure in contemporary historiography. Unlike Israel Ori, he conducted his diplomatic discussions and political deals from a position of strength. He could present himself as a representative of a strong government and he was asked to act as envoy by both the Iranian government and several Western states. But he concluded treaties that challenged the collective might of the European powers, led by the French government, in the name not of a government but of the Iranian Armenian community. The treaties ensured the continued access of the community traders to European markets and defeated all efforts by the new colonial powers to leverage their political might for taking control of the international trade through concessions obtained from Oriental despots. It was the collective strength furnished by both his Iranian and Armenian identities that Emamgholi Beg could draw upon. And it was the weakness of the last king of the Safavid dynasty that undermined his efforts. Two further things might be added to these observations. Firstly, the strength of the two identities is complementary. The Iranian and Armenian sides of the communal identity should not be viewed as independent entities across which compartmentalization should take place, rather, one draws upon the other; and the demise of one undermines the other. Secondly, the two identities should collectively as well as individually draw upon other identities that the community might lay claim to. The collective strength of all ethnic communities giving rise to Iranian society, combined with all Armenian communities, in mainland as well as in diaspora, together with their commonalities with other communities in the international arena constitutes the basis upon which Iranian Armenians can draw in order to forge the ideal communal identity. These components need by no means be conflict-free. The diversity of the subidentities is itself a source of richness and vitality rather than a weakness. The Iranian Armenian community, far from being quickly assimilated by stronger colonizing identities, could not only survive, but also assume leading position especially after catastrophic events like the forced migration enforced by Shah Abbas. How could that be possible? The important role played by the Iranian Armenian community in forging modern Iranian as well as Armenian identities is not only a most interesting subject for investigation and theorization by itself, but also, the resolution of that dilemma can perhaps shed light upon sources upon which all civil societies can draw upon so as to emancipate themselves from political power. It can be argued that the very displacement of the Armenians as well as their minority Status placed them in a position allowing them to play important role in the modernization process in Iran (Rogers, 1995:3-36). Theoretical constructs like "trade diaspora" and "trade network" have

already been discussed. To these one should add Tölölyan's concept of "diasporic public sphere" to explain how stateless powers can play important national and international roles (Tölölyan's, 1996:36-8). Although it is true that the reproduction of identities in conditions of diaspora required more than informal organizations of ethnic minorities, I wish to emphasize the civil rather than political nature of the Iranian Armenian community, as well as its grounding on Iranian society. A semi-formal arbitrage institution similar to an Assembly of Merchants would certainly be useful in maintaining high levels of social capital. But it could not possibly be the key factor which enabled Julfan merchants to generate and maintain trust, trustworthiness, and uniform norms necessary for cooperation and collective action (Aslanian, 2004:37-100). The community in Julfa had no shortage of internal conflicts. Differing cosmovisions have always been a part of the Iranian Armenian cognitive structure. The most important theoretical grounding for description of how a displaced minority community can play an important role in spread of innovation and social, cultural, and economic modernization can be provided by the concept of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983:99-103). Rather than being sign of pathology, schizophrenia can be viewed as a liberation strategy. Multiplicity of identities is a process that deconstructs the totality associated with the "self", frees the subject, and creates a flux that overcomes all barriers and codes. To quote Haraway: "if we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions. There is no way to read the following list from a standpoint of 'identification', of a unitary self. The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora" (Haraway, 1991:63-81).

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**TEACHING THE REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICA IN THE WRITINGS OF THE  
DIASPORA:  
A CALL FOR THE RE-DEFINITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents the researcher's experience teaching a course in African and African American Literature to students in College in the mid West of the US. The paper exposes the diversity in the student population and the various texts chosen for the course, and it also provides the reader with the students' responses or reactions to the various texts chosen for the course syllabus, and also the students' reactions to the instructor's pedagogical approach. The paper ends with a call for the redefinition and revision of the scope of the field and also of the curriculum of African American Literature course.

**Key words** : diaspora, francophone, anglophone, pedagogy.



## **1. Introduction**

This paper makes a case for the redefinition of the scope of the field of African American Literature. In the paper I demonstrate that a revised and broadened African American Literature course that comprises African American writings, continental Anglophone and Francophone African writings and also Caribbean Francophone and Anglophone works can effectively be taught in US colleges and I present my experience teaching a class at the English Department of Illinois State University as an example.

The first part of the paper provides some basic background information on the course and the students who enrolled in the course; it points out the increasing number of African students on Illinois State University campus and US college campuses in general, and the first part of the paper also exposes my students' reactions to the texts on the course syllabus and an analysis of those reactions. The second part of the paper addresses the reflections that I had after teaching that course: the need for a redefinition of the scope of the field of African American Literature in order to represent all the various elements that fall into the category of African American Literature, due to the change in demographics which in itself is a consequence of globalization.

## **2. Description, Basic Information on the Course and Context**

In the Spring of 2007 I taught an undergraduate English course at Illinois State University, Normal. The course was titled "Selected African and African Diasporan Texts"; it was based on the representations of Africa in selected works of African American writers. The course fell under the rubric of "Text in Context" courses and I was teaching it as a graduate student in order to gather some data for the pedagogy section of my PhD dissertation that I was writing on Diaspora Issues. The texts on the course syllabus were some of the primary texts that I was analyzing in my dissertation. So my personal background and my academic interest informed

the topic I was writing my dissertation on. My topic itself was “ Intersecting Pan-Africanisms: Africa, North America and the Caribbean” and I was intending to do a comparative study of pan-Africanism, focusing on the specific features of Francophone and Anglophone pan-Africanism and by pan-Africanism I meant the relations between Africa and her Diaspora ( African Americans and Caribbeans). Born and raised in Burkina Faso (French speaking Africa) and having had part of my education in an English speaking African country, Ghana, and also in the US, I have always been interested in comparing Francophone and Anglophone trends and also the relations between Africans and African Americans on the one hand, and the relations between Africans and the Francophone Caribbeans (from Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, etc) on the other hand, in writing. So my personal background and my interests account for the choice of texts on the course syllabus. The following texts constituted the primary readings on course the syllabus: African American texts like Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Richard Wright’s *Black Power*. The Francophone Caribbean text on the syllabus was Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*, and as samples of African writings I chose Mariama Ba’s *So Long A Letter*, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Kofi Awoonor’s *Comes the Voyager at Last*. The theoretical readings included Ali Mazrui’s *The African: A Triple Heritage*, Vincent Khapoya’s *The African Experience* and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*. The following videos were watched along with the readings and discussions: Ali Mazrui’s *The Africans* (volume 1 and 2), Sembène Ousmane’s *Xala*, a PBS documentary on Marcus Garvey and the video versions of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Color Purple*.

Another factor that led me to include African authors on the syllabus was the change in the demographic of the area. Bloomington-Normal (the town where Illinois State University is) has been experiencing for the last fifteen years the recruitment of more and more African students. Prior to that, the area was “lilly white” as people often referred to it; there were very few black people (including African Americans and continental Africans). The demographics started to change because of the two main employers in the area (the college and the insurance company State Farm) started to recruit and employ respectively African students and African skilled immigrants. Many African American students also got enrolled in the college around the same time, due to the Affirmative Action and other structures put in place in order to provide more African American students with the chance to get a college education. These are the figures for the enrolment of African and African American students at ISU for Fall 2007, Fall 2008, Fall 2009 and Fall 2010, from the Illinois State University fact book. For details related to

immigration protocols and confidentiality, the college did not provide the exact number of Africans (who are referred to as “alien non immigrants” in the records) in the enrolment, hence the use of the term **Black/African American students** to refer to African students and African American students put together.

**Fall 2007:**

975 undergraduate Black/African American students

98 Black/African American graduate students

1073 total number of Black/African American students

**Fall 2008:**

990 undergraduate Black/African American students

102 graduate Black/African American students

1092 total number of Black students (graduate and undergraduate)

**Fall 2009:**

1015 undergraduate Black/African American students

106 graduate Black/African American students

1121 total number of Black students (graduate and undergraduate)

**Fall 2010:**

1032 undergraduate Black/African American students

103 graduate Black/African American students

1135 total number of undergraduate and graduate Black students

As the figures above show it, the enrolment of African and African American students kept increasing from 2007 to 2010 and that in turn increases diversity in the student population. That fact is also what led me to design a course syllabus that takes into account the students' backgrounds and experiences. I strongly believe that one of the most effective ways to teach Literature is to find ways in which students can relate to the materials on the syllabus and that can be done when students see themselves and their personal experience in the works under study. And in this case, including African writings into the African American Literature syllabus created a context where African students, African American students and white students could relate to the materials under study, since African American works and continental African works also make room for the experience of white students.

The increase in the number of African students on US colleges is not limited to the state of Illinois only. The whole of the US is affected and several scholars have pondered the issue. In

“Who Are the Other African Americans?” John R. Logan locates the areas where concentrations of African immigrant populations settle in the US. He noticed that Africans are dispersed, unlike Afro-Caribbeans who are heavily concentrated in some few selected areas:

Only a quarter of Africans live in one of the ten largest metropolitan regions, and these metro areas are geographically dispersed. This dispersion, in combination with their smaller numbers, may help explain the “invisibility” of African immigrants in the United States. In contrast, Afro-Caribbeans are heavily concentrated in just a few metro areas, all on the East Coast. Six out of ten live in New York, Miami, and Ft.Lauderdale metro areas; nearly six hundred thousand live in New York alone. (Shaw-Taylor and Tuch 52)

Logan also points out that African immigrants distinguish themselves from African Americans by their higher educational and income levels. That can be explained by the fact that many of the African immigrants already have a high educational level before they enter the US, and many of those immigrants seize the various education opportunities available in the US. In “African Diasporas and Academics”, Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza captures the irony represented by the staggering number of African-educated immigrants in the US: “Africa, the least educated and most underdeveloped continent in the world has the most educated population in the world’s most developed country” (*The Study of Africa* 99). Zeleza points out that the new black immigrants do not only identify with Africa as most of the historic diaspora does, but they also display ethnic and nationalist interests or inclination:

African migrations to the North, especially Western Europe and North America are increasing. Many of these migrants are constituting themselves into new diasporas, whose identities involve complex negotiations with the host African diaspora communities and their countries of origin. If the diasporas of enslavement—the historic diasporas—had no choice but to see themselves in pan-Africanist terms whenever they identified with Africa, the diasporas of colonialism and neocolonialism—the contemporary diasporas—are more disposed to see themselves in pan-national, or even pan-ethnic, terms. (*The Study of Africa* 90)

Beside the fact that the African academic diaspora has to engage and negotiate with numerous factors and challenges like immigration requirements, and also “how to climb the slippery poles of the highly racialised American academy” (Zeleza 98), and how to meet the huge expectations and demands that families, relatives and friends place on them, in the form of financial and moral support, African immigrants also have the responsibility or the “abstract compulsion to defend and promote Africa in a country where things African are routinely denigrated and demonized” (Zeleza 98).

In “A Dream Deferred: Undocumented Students at CUNY”, Carolina Bank Munoz captures that urgency of the phenomenon that immigration into the US has reached, and also the impact of that immigration on our schools and students. She points out the increasing number of immigrant students in schools and stresses the torments, insecurities, anxiety and hustles that those students face due to their “immigration status”. She writes:

I first became aware of the difficulties for undocumented students at the City University of New York (CUNY) when I started teaching a course at Brooklyn College, a CUNY campus, on the sociology of immigration. On the first day of class, five students requested appointments to speak with me in private. This was unusual to say the least. All five were undocumented and had family members who were undocumented. They were hoping I could help. (*Radical Teacher* No 84 p.8)

The other reasons behind the insertion of these materials in the syllabus (beside my interest in comparative diasporan issues) is the fact that they provide students with salient features of continental African pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial societies; the racial and political issues confronting African Americans and also the relations between African Americans and continental Africans. Those texts also deal with the features of Francophone Caribbean societies and the relations between Francophone Caribbeans and continental Africans. I included Maryse Condé and Frantz Fanon in the syllabus because I was intending to break a new ground in the field of African American Studies: the position or role of the Francophone Caribbean (that I also refer to as the Francophone Diaspora) and also the role of Francophone Africa in the field of African American and Diasporan Studies. Not much work had been done on those two topics.

The course was therefore intended as a broader, more globally-focused alternative to the traditional African-American literature course. Another goal of the course was to introduce students to postmodern and global perspectives; I wanted the students to look at the various texts in the class with the kind of interconnectedness and holistic approach that Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2000 & 2004) pose in their postmodern and global analysis in *Empire* (45) and *Multitude* (323-24): the existence of the first world in the third world, nation states losing their sovereignty, and several other features of global analyses of literary texts. My attitude in terms of students’ responses was informed by Robert Scholes’s notion of “the strong reader” (66) in *The Rise and Fall of English*: I encouraged students to approach the texts with information they already knew, if they thought that such an approach could help them in their reactions to the texts. The main topic in the class was the representations of Africa and her/its diaspora, and other important themes like race, migration, economy, society, marriage,

polygamy, education, politics, globalization and all issues that the students find to be of interest or relevance to the course content. The mode of evaluation was two main papers, weekly journal entries on the readings and in-class discussions. My pedagogy in this class (as in all my classes) is learner-centered. I personally went through the teacher-centered education system in French speaking Africa and I know how crippling such a pedagogy can be. When I discovered learner-centered pedagogy in my graduate school education in the US through the readings on Paulo Freire and bell hooks, I simply embraced it and made it my teaching philosophy. I always put the learner at the center of my teaching. I encourage my students and empower them so that they can frame and express their own thoughts, reflections and positions on the materials that we study. So my students end up trusting themselves and I also make sure they grasp new information and learn new things. My learner-centered pedagogy is not the extremely humanist one that allows everything in the classroom, or creates lawlessness and cacophony. My pedagogical approach affected the students' reaction to the materials as the reader will notice in the next sections.

### **3. Student Population, Background & Student Response(s) to Some the Texts Under Study**

I had sixteen(16) students enrolled in my class and fifteen (15) of them were from the Midwest of the US, specifically from the college city (twin cities of Bloomington-Normal) and cities and towns around that area-- between Chicago, Normal and Springfield, Illinois--. One of the students was a young man from West Africa; there were nine (9) white females, one (1) African American female, and five (5) white males. I have included in this section the students' reactions to the texts (among all those on the syllabus) that dealt directly with diasporan issues.

The first discussion we had in class was during the introduction part of the course, after watching Ali Mazrui's *The African* (volume 1). My students saw several good points in the documentary and some of them were anxious over certain issues. Many students commented on the family structure as it is portrayed in the documentary. One of them had this to say: "*I realized that in Africa, people do not talk so much about relations like cousins, nephews, etc. People simply belong to the same extended family and that is so cool. I think that we Americans can learn a lot from this. We could borrow such an idea to improve our society here. It reduces individualism*". The tribal marks made on the bodies of children with razor blades chocked some of the students, and they understood when I explained to them that this

practice is not common anymore and that is was a way to assert group identity. One of the students moved along the same line and said this: *“I understand why they would do such things in the past. It could be a very effective means to strengthen people’s identity. I also noticed that the marks were made for medicinal purposes when elders spray some medicinal powders on the marks in order to cure diseases and immunize children. So marking the body was certainly a useful practice with so many benefits, and now that modernity made it possible for all people to have access to basic modern medical treatment I understand why such a practice is disappearing”*. I was really delighted to see that my learner-centered approach and the use of texts alongside documentaries was making it easy for the students to understand and engage the texts.

One of the discussions that I still remember vividly came up during our study of Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*. In the novel, the main protagonist is Veronica, a Caribbean Francophone woman from Guadeloupe. Her identity crisis begins at home in Guadeloupe when she dates white French men hoping to elevate her status by doing that. Frustrated after her French lovers sleep with her and leave her, she goes to Paris, where she is again miserable because she does not belong there either: she is referred to as a “black Carribean woman”. She ultimately travels to Guinée in West Africa where she dates an influential politician named Ibrahim Sory, hoping to embrace her African roots and achieve a sense of “stable identity” through that relationship. There again she is disappointed because her African lover simply treats her like a sex object. Out of disappointment, Veronica flies back to Paris at the end of the novel. Almost all the students in the class found that in *Heremakonon*, Veronica’s search for her identity is a failure from the onset. Most of them thought that *“she is promiscuous, and had to sort things out with her own self before setting out to look for her roots”*. One of my students who saw nothing good in Veronica’s identity crisis and quest for stability made this comment: *“she sleeps with everybody hoping that she could solve her problem that way.... I wonder how someone can make such a choice. She simply had to buy a ticket and go to the Jerry Springer show”*. The African American woman in the class had a different reaction to *Heremakhonon* and she said: *“Veronica reminds me of the familiar picture of women grappling with the challenges of self-discovery, regardless of their race. Veronica’s own conflict with herself is what undermines her identity quest. Her ignorance of her own culture [the Caribbean one]and that of the Guineans is the reason for her failure in her mission”*. Only one white female student was sympathetic towards Veronica and she puts it in these terms: *“Veronica was not accepted in Paris, where she was considered as a black Caribbean woman, and in Africa also, where she was considered as a foreigner. She tried several times and*

*several things in order to end her alienation and rejection and also to find a place where she belongs but it never worked. She did her best, and deserves to be congratulated on the fact that she insists and does not easily give up”.*

Another student was struck by the deep analysis of self-loathing and confusion conveyed in Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*. His criticism shaped his response to *Heremakhonon*. These were his thoughts. *“I came to realize that due to the fact that blacks were once slaves, black men feel the need to prove themselves to white men, while white men always feel superior to black men. Now the problem for the black man is that once he becomes educated, he is no longer considered as a black, and he doesn’t also fit within the white community. So as a consequence, black people who better themselves are still looked down upon by whites, but they are also exiled vis à vis their own race”.*

The African student in the class had this reflection regarding Veronica and search for a cure to her rootlessness and confusion: *“I am not surprised that she could not find what she wanted when she went to Africa. Africans today on the African continent have not experienced slavery and they do not understand when blacks from the US and the Caribbean are bitter because of slavery. Those blacks from the diaspora accuse us Africans of selling them to slave traders and I do not understand why they are blaming Africans today. We did not sell them to slave traders, some of our forefathers did and we the young generation of Africans must not pay for that. I do not also understand when blacks from the diaspora say that they are lost and confused, like Veronica does. Africans do not understand the situation of the blacks from the diaspora because we had different experiences although we are all blacks. So no wonder Veronica got disappointed when she tried to get some help from Africans”.*

These points reveal the enthusiasm with which my students engaged the texts which at first might sound abstruse to them since most of them had not studied African or Caribbean texts before, either in High School or in college. The other pedagogical strategy that I used in the class was the interrogative summary. It enabled me to see the exact degree of engagement that the students had with the materials under study, and also their specific responses and reflections on the texts.

### *3.1 .Interrogative Summary*

This is the essence of what I asked my students to do in their weekly journal entries. It is a summary of the points that stood out to them during their readings. It should also contain many questions on the ideas and concepts that they do not understand. The journals should also contain many connective answers; I encouraged them to draw some connections between the



themes and issues that emerge in our readings of primary texts and theoretical materials. This is a section of the interrogation that a student did in her journal entry on *The Dilemma of a Ghost*: “I was surprised to see that the parents of Ato [the Ghanaian young man who married Eulalie the African American girl] refer to Eulalie as a white woman. I could not imagine how a black woman can be referred to as white. That was a big question that baffled me. But later when I paused in the middle of the reading to think, it dawned on me that in the documentary we had watched some few weeks go on “African Americans Returning to Ghana”, we heard some Ghanaians referring to the African American returnees as “obroni” which means white person in Twi, one of the Ghanaian languages. That is when I understood why Eulalie was referred to by her Ghanaian in-laws “a white woman”, although she is a black African American woman.

The West African student in the class reacted to that remark in these terms: “Africans consider both white Americans and African Americans to be white, not because their skin is white ( although that is the case with white Americans), but simply because they come from the US which is a Western country, a rich country, a country of white people. When I was in my country [he was from Ghana] I saw many African Americans getting angry because Ghanaians referred to them as “obroni” (white person). It is still difficult for Africans to believe that African Americans are black or that they are from Africa. That is where the misunderstanding comes from. African Americans insist that they are from Africa and Africans love African Americans and consider to be rich Americans or white”.

Those interrogative summaries or weekly journal entries were very helpful and enabled the students to draw a sort of mental map of some of the salient points in our readings. The same method also helped a lot in the sense that those interrogative summaries functioned as the springboard for in-class discussion. At the beginning of every class I made sure to go round and ask every student to share with the class the key points that they had in their journal entry or interrogative summary. Fruitful discussions ensued, a student would complete a point mentioned by their classmate, or answer a question raised by another one, or simply refute someone’s argument and propose a different argument, answer or interpretation. I always told them that all personal arguments are good (and are allowed in my class) as long as they are coherent and respectful of other arguments.

The work which generated the largest number of interesting reactions was Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. One student wrote that Africa is not treated with seriousness in the play; she illustrated her point with the following statement: “Beneatha’s interest in Africa is not a serious one, it is flimsy, like a passing phase, or like one of those hobbies that

*Beneatha signs up for and then drops them. The only time when Beneatha considers Africa with seriousness is when she is standing face to face with the hard reality of economic hardship, when her brother Walter gambled away the money that would have been used to pay her fees in medical school. When Asagai suggested that they go to Nigeria together, that moment is when Beneatha begins to contemplate Africa (and a return to Africa) with seriousness”.*

One of the ladies asked this question in her journal entry on *The Dilemma of a Ghost*: “Had Ato come back to Ghana with a lot of money, would he and his wife Eulalie have been welcomed in a better way by Ato’s parents?” That question represents one of situations where I intervene with comments that might help the students grasp some of the issues in the texts. So as a response to that student’s question, I told the class that if Ato and Eulalie had come back with a lot of money, the difficulties that marked their reintegration would have been reduced because Ato comes from a poor Ghanaian family, with limited means. I also added that coming back with much money could not ensure a total reintegration because Ato’s parents, like all African parents who still adhere to traditional values would not be contented with money only. They would ask to know more about the background of their daughter-in-law and would watch her behavior and how she relates to them as her in-laws. In a nutshell, I told my students that financial security could have played a role, but the disappointments around issues like “Eulalie being a descendent of slaves” as the in-laws put it would still have been raised.

We also did regular group assignments in the class. I asked students to form groups based on their affinity, so they could team up with whomever they wanted to work with. I then distributed a list of discussion questions to each group, and each group had different questions to discuss. Those sessions were very fruitful; students argued, shared their opinion and came up with very precutting questions that they could not answer. I would then listen to each group sharing their questions and answers with the class and I would ask the entire class to ponder some of the questions that the group discussions raised. One of such questions arose around *Anowa* (this play and *The Dilemma of the Ghost* were in the same collection by the same author) was this: “What is the role of the two old men referred to as “the- mouth- that- eats- salt and pepper” in *Anowa*? Some of the students thought that this expression was portraying the 2 men as gossips, as the 2 old women who are mentioned in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. Others thought that the author named the 2 old men in those terms in order to provide an insider’s view that helps understand better why events unfold the way they do in the play.

Another aspect that impressed me in the students discussion of *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is the fact that some of the students brought their own experience on the text and that pleased me

a lot. I realized that they were gradually turning into strong readers as Robert Scholes put it. A white female student had this to say: *“Eulalie and Ato remind me of my sister who married a Nigerian young man. We accepted him because my sister informed us in advance, and told us everything we wanted to know about him before she introduced him to our family. We were satisfied with who he was and we still tease my sister once a while because her husband speaks with an accent but that is all, we love him. I think that Ato’s relatives find it difficult to accept Eulalie because Ato did not inform his parents in advance. He did not take his time to inform his parents and to “educate” them in advance about his wife’s culture, habits, beliefs, etc. Ato has simply been a bad go-between, from the very beginning. He is not a good intermediary, and I blame him for the trouble his wife is going through.”* All the students were struck by the overall portrayals of Africans as self-confident and African Americans as insecure in Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. One of them captured that difference in these terms: *“I noticed that in A Raisin in the Sun, the Nigerian young man Asagai is very confident and focused. He is so serious with his studies that he even travels to Canada in summer to take special classes. He also dresses formally and neatly and speaks very formal English, although he has an accent. He also seems to be from a well to do and stable family in Africa and the proof lies in the fact that he asked his sister to send him some traditional African clothes for his friend Beneatha and her sister did that. On the other hand Walter Lee is an African American chauffeur who only thinks of making quick money. He does not behave like a responsible father and husband. Another point that surprised me is that Mamma, the matriarch in the play, and her son Walter Lee do not seem to know much about History. For instance, Mama confuses Liberia and Nigeria, and Walter Lee thinks that Africans are tribal warriors and he also despises college students like George and his own sister Beneatha. He does not seem to value education, unlike Asagai who takes education and life in general very seriously”*.

The students’ response to Richard Wright’s statement in *Black Power*, in his letter to President Nkrumah of Ghana that “Africans’ life must be militarized” (389) was very interesting. A white male student interpreted that statement this way: *“Wright meant that Africans need more discipline and hard work in order to advance to a more modern and technologically advanced stage”*. Another young man interpreted the same statement this way: *“Wright means that Africans should arm themselves and fight the colonizers out of the continent, and I am outraged at such an advice or suggestion. Richard Wright is simply calling for more weapons in Africa, and such an act would increase the civil wars that are already claiming innumerable lives in Africa”*.

Some of the most interesting student reflections in this class came up during our study of *Comes the Voyager at Last* where the African American protagonist ultimately makes it back home to Ghana and achieves a reintegration within the community. I had anticipated that the students would find it difficult dealing with the complex plot of the novel, the flashbacks, the non-linear trajectory of the main protagonist's trip from America to Africa and the subplots that really add to the artistic power of Awoonor's novel. In order to facilitate things for the students, I asked them to answer or discuss a certain number of questions that I had written on the board, and one of the questions asked the students to determine the main events and time frames in the work. By setting that question I was intending to help the students grasp the key events, periods and characters in the work. In their answers, the students concluded that the main events in *Comes the Voyager at Last* can be classified in two main categories, based on the timeline: the period of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century slave trade in Africa, and the 1950s-1960s, or the period of Civil Rights Movement in America. One of the students made a very powerful yet controversial, thought-provoking and delicate remark during the discussion on the Civil Rights Movement in the US and decolonization in Africa. With a lot of confidence he said: “ *the Civil Rights Movement and the decolonization struggles yielded considerable important victories for African Americans and continental Africans, I mean independence from colonial powers on one side and desegregation and other similar achievements for African Americans on the other side. But while the combat of the Civil Right Movement resulted in some institutions being put in place in order to ensure some degree of human and social development like schools, hospitals, security forces for blacks in the US, the European colonial powers gave a pseudo-independence to their African colonies, so that neo-colonialism could start its course and ensure the impoverishment of African countries while enriching European countries*”. I was pleased at this juxtaposition between African decolonization and the African Americans' Civil Rights Movement, from a discussion based on an African novel, and I was also aware of the debatable nature of the point on the positive results of the Civil Rights movement on African American's lives.

#### **4. Analysis of the Students' Reactions & Implications**

My students' reaction to these texts was highly informed by their background. Most of them being from the Mid West of the US where the majority of people --except those in large urban cosmopolitan areas like Chicago—have not had much interaction with diasporans (especially

Africans and African Americans) as I mentioned above, referring to the recent arrival of African students, African immigrant workers and African American students in that part of the Midwest of the US. As the discussion above shows, my students enthusiastically engaged the texts on the syllabus, and the data also shows that some of the students simply looked at the protagonists' challenges as consequences of wrong choices in life. Examples of such judgments are in the comments that some students made over Beneatha's impulsiveness, her determination and involvement in a tireless identity quest in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Those students simply thought that Beneatha was not serious in life and did not know what she wants. The same students also looked at Veronica's relationships with both white and black men as a sign of frivolity. It is interesting to point out that my students' reactions to the texts reflected their background and experience: very little previous contact with Africans and African Americans and also the impact of the negative stereotypes that Western Modernity attached to Africans and African Americans by presenting them as brutal and ignorant savages: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (to some extent) and Merlon Riggs's *Ethnic Notions* are repositories of such stereotypes. I still remember the reflection of a white young man who saw Hansberry's work as another version of a Western classic. When I asked him to elaborate on his point this is what he had to say: "*I just do not see anything new or impressive about A Raisin in the Sun. It is just another version of the Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, because both works deal with the desire to make it in life by borrowing money from others. Hansberry simply reproduced Shakespeare's work*". This comment shows that many of our students still believe in the Eurocentric view that no original, respectable and important literary work can be produced by authors who were branded as "the others, the primitives, the orientals"

## 5. The Need for a Redefinition of African American Literature

As my experience teaching this class shows, a broader and more inclusive syllabus for the African American Literature course can be taught to even students who have had no previous exposure to continental African or diasporan issues. Almost 90% of the students in my "Text in Context" class did not have any previous exposure to African and African American writings, but that did not prevent them from delving into the texts, raising very relevant questions and helping provide answers to those questions. With the increasing number of African students on our US college campuses, the teaching of African American Literature cannot remain limited to African American writings only. Continental African and diasporan

Caribbean Francophone works which for a long time have been excluded from the field of African American Literature have to be included into the curriculum. Teaching this class also enabled me to see how American students—blacks and whites— and African students react to the issue of the relations between Africa and her diasporas. For many of my students, that class was the first opportunity they had to reflect over topics on Africa, African Americans and also the relations between Africans and African Americans, as they emerge in literary works. Many of them expressed their gratitude for a course which was such an eye-opener. The impact that the class had on the students could be measured by the fact that the first day of class, none of the students could define (or was willing to define) or state what she/he thought the term “diaspora” meant. Looking at the quality of the work that the students produced at the end of the semester, I clearly noticed how comfortable they had become with the whole concept of diaspora, precisely the African diaspora in America. Teaching this class also enabled me to see the necessity to incorporate diaspora issues especially the relations between Africa and the Francophone and Anglophone diasporas in the teaching of African American Literature. Such a change in the curriculum is much needed now.

The teaching of African American Literature has been traditionally focused on the following topics: slave narratives, the Harlem Renaissance, contemporary race issues, the interaction between black and white America, and the power conflict and identity issues that result from that interaction. Recent works of critics like Henry Louis Gates Jr and Kwame Anthony Appiah take a close look at the identity issue and power relations that exist between African Americans and white America. Appiah’s works particularly engage Africa, but the examination of the relations between Francophone Africans and the Francophone diaspora in the Caribbean has not been introduced in the curriculum of African American Literature yet. The class that I taught at Illinois State University shows how Francophone diasporan texts can be taught alongside the texts that have so far been considered as canonical in African American Literature. Such an innovation will benefit students in several ways: they will be exposed to Francophone continental African works, Francophone Caribbean works, plus the African American works which are generally taught in African American Literature.

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## HACIA UNA VISIÓN INTEGRADORA DE LA INTERPRETACIÓN Y DE LA MEDIACIÓN

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### **Resumen**

El presente artículo pretende compartir la experiencia y los resultados de un proyecto puesto en marcha en el territorio genovés en 2007 y que implica tres ámbitos de investigación en un trabajo de recogida de datos: educativo, socio-sanitario y jurídico y dos ámbitos transversales: mediación comunitaria y percepción de la calidad de la interpretación consecutiva de estudiantes en prácticas. El artículo presenta los resultados obtenidos en todos los ámbitos, con la salvedad del educativo, describiendo algunos de los aspectos más destacados para un estudio integrado de las lenguas extranjeras, los lenguajes y el fenómeno migratorio. Las disciplinas de la interpretación interlingüística y de la mediación constituyen el telón de fondo de todo el proyecto.

### **Palabras clave:**

interpretación, mediación, ámbito sanitario, ámbito judicial, inmigración

## 1. Introducción

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo el de presentar el trabajo llevado a cabo desde 2007 en Génova en un estudio de campo que une la interpretación interlingüística (concretamente en el par de lenguas español-italiano) al análisis del uso de las lenguas y de los lenguajes en ámbito institucional y vecinal. El trasfondo teórico lo brinda la mediación, entendida en una acepción muy amplia, tanto como enfoque cultural, lo que permite encarar las conflictividades potenciales, también comunicativas, como constructivas, así como herramienta y técnicas para realizar auténticos estudios interdisciplinarios, intentando interrelacionar y sinergizar diferentes disciplinas como la comunicación, la sociología, la lingüística aplicada y la traducción.

Los ámbitos de intervención son los siguientes, en orden cronológico: desde 2007 llevamos a cabo un estudio en el ámbito socio-sanitario, con especial referencia a la comunicación en los hospitales públicos genoveses (véase primer apartado a continuación), en 2008 agregamos el sector jurídico-judicial, siempre centrándonos en la comunicación entre clientes/acusados no italianos y personal italiano en los juzgados genoveses y de la región (véase segundo apartado); en 2009-2010 empezamos a ampliar nuestro horizonte y a ocuparnos de analizar la comunicación y las relaciones entre profesionales y vecinos de diferentes sectores (barrios genoveses caracterizados por conflictividades, trabajo con el cuerpo de la policía municipal de Génova, el ámbito educativo entendido como observatorio privilegiado del territorio y al territorio) en los cuales poner en marcha un trabajo de sensibilización a la mediación comunitaria, con una parte de capacitación a actores clave de cada grupo y con consiguientes encuentros de seguimiento y constitución de alianzas y de colectivos de ciudadanos activos (véase el tercer apartado de este artículo). Desde 2011 encaminamos un estudio específico de recogida de datos para analizar la percepción de la calidad en los destinatarios de los servicios de interpretación consecutiva facilitados por estudiantes de la Laurea Magistrale (cuarto y quinto año de la carrera) en Traducción e Interpretación de la Universidad de Génova (véase el cuarto apartado de este trabajo). Cabe indicar que este estudio se entrelaza con la parte de investigación en mediación comunitaria: nuestros estudiantes en prácticas intervienen como intérpretes en todas las ocasiones formadoras del trabajo de sensibilización y capacitación en mediación comunitaria ya que todos los formadores, hasta la fecha en que presentamos este artículo, abril de 2012, son nativos de lengua castellana.

Los modelos de referencia son múltiples y difíciles de aplicar sin más a nuestra investigación: se va de los estudios sobre comunicación, interpretación y población inmigrada, con especial atención al ámbito socio-sanitario e institucional en general (Valero Garcés, 2003,

2005, 2008, 2011;) a los que ahondan el tema de la percepción de la calidad de la interpretación (Kurtz, 1989; Kopczynski, 1994; Mesa, 1997; Martínez, 2011; Morelli, 2008a, 2010; Pöchhacker, 2004), pero adaptados al contexto de la interpretación consecutiva en ámbito social por parte de estudiantes en prácticas; se saca del análisis crítico del discurso (De Fina et al., 2006; Muñoz, 2010; Mariottini, 2012) y del análisis de la conversación aplicados a la interpretación en el ámbito sanitario e institucional, más en general (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2008; Cirillo, 2010; Cirillo & Farini, 2011; Farini, 2012; Gavioli, 2009); se analizan los textos y los materiales recogidos a la luz del análisis lingüístico-pragmático contrastivo italiano-español, basándose en los numerosísimos estudios de Calvi, 1995; 2003; 2010, entre otros) y se ha elaborado el material y las herramientas de recogida de datos en hospitales, estructuras socio-sanitarias y jurídicas-judiciales replicando, debidamente ajustados, los materiales y los métodos seguidos por Del Bañol Aledo et al., 2008; González, 2008; Grupo Miras, 2011; Pöchhacker & Schlesinger, 2007). Punto de referencia esencial para el ámbito socio-sanitario fueron los ejemplos de buenas prácticas del grupo CRIT de la Jaume I de Castellón ([www.crit.uji.es](http://www.crit.uji.es), Sales Salvador, 2010; Raga Gimeno, 2008, 2010). También de ayuda e inspiración han sido todos los trabajos de un pujante equipo de sociólogos en Génova de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y de un Centro de Estudios (Medi) y, en especial, algunos que pueden considerarse pioneros (Queirolo Palmas, 2006; Ambrosini et al., 2006). Asimismo, cabe destacar las relaciones y las colaboraciones con el recién constituido Centro di Ricerca Interateneo di Analisi dell'Interazione e della Mediazione que une a nueve universidades italianas y que puede contar con una sólida red de colaboraciones internacionales (véase <http://www.aim.unimore.it/site/home.html>).

El objetivo general de nuestro trabajo es el de intentar encontrar puntos de referencia, continuidades y convergencias entre las disciplinas de la interpretación interlingüística (nuestro eje tanto por formación como por experiencia didáctica y profesional) y de la mediación, evitando fragmentar excesivamente los sectores de intervención y los ámbitos de estudio. Si bien es indudable que cada uno de nosotros, sobre todo si actúa en el entorno académico, tiene el deber de rendir cuentas sobre lo que hace dentro de su sector y disciplinas concretas, no creemos que se pueda alcanzar la auténtica interdisciplinariedad sin una real contaminación de ámbitos, aun a sabiendas de que esto puede convertirse en un boomerang desde el punto de vista de las poco clarividentes (i)lógicas académicas. En nuestra opinión, en momentos como éstos, de escasos recursos de todo tipo y de remotas posibilidades de que lo que estamos vendiendo como formación se convierta automáticamente en salidas laborales ciertas, empujar hacia la fragmentación del espíritu general de la mediación (sobre el que volveremos en los

apartados siguientes) y declinar a embudo técnicas, competencias y especialidades que pretenden ser cada vez más sectoriales y específicas, sigue más las razones del mercado que efectivos y reales motivos de utilidad territorial y de funcionalidad.

Por otro lado, para nosotros, investigar es trabajar con la comunidad y en la comunidad, con el territorio y el mayor número de actores implicados, con el fin, sí, de ahondar conocimiento y establecer pistas y pautas para una mejor comprensión y actividad interpretativa de lo que supone relacionarse con diferentes idiolectos, lenguas, lenguajes y culturas, pero sin olvidar “mojarse” y lanzarse a la palestra (aún bien preparados y equipados, nunca desprevenidos) para intentar intervenir activamente en el territorio y hacer que la investigación en lenguas y lenguajes se convierta en herramientas prácticas que puedan aprovecharse tanto en el mundo de la gente de la calle, como por parte de los expertos y los profesionales que trabajan en el campo y dentro de la comunidad científica.

Trabajar de esta manera es bastante representativo para nosotros del enfoque cultural de la mediación, que tuvimos la suerte de encontrar en nuestro camino de estudio en 2005 y que nos inspira como trasfondo general de lo que estamos llevando a cabo (véase [www.congresosdemediacion.com](http://www.congresosdemediacion.com)).

Con este proyecto intentamos aunar el entramado lingüístico (tanto intra- como inter-) con lo social, en una especie de pattern (Bateson, 1984) donde se entretajan tanto las aplicaciones concretas de la mediación como las de la interpretación, sin olvidar que las personas implicadas en un proceso de in(comunicación) y que viven en relación, no pueden prescindir de construir horizontes simbólicos compartidos en los espacios que configuran y que la labor de los mediadores se realiza en los intersticios, en las grietas y en los resquebrajos que se abren en estos espacios.

Los objetivos operativos de nuestros proyectos, a partir de 2011, han sido básicamente cuatro:

- por un lado, el arriba bosquejado, es decir, aplicar la mediación comunitaria y vecinal en un intento de synergizar los diferentes ámbitos de la mediación en algunos barrios genoveses caracterizados por tensiones latentes o bien conflictos abiertos;
- en segundo lugar, aplicar las herramientas de la mediación comunitaria y vecinal para la sensibilización del personal de la Policía Local de Génova. En este caso nos guió la idea de la imagen de proximidad que tradicionalmente en nuestra ciudad ha tenido este tipo de agente y, luego, la introducción, en junio de 2011, de dos artículos dentro del Reglamento de la Policía Urbana de Génova, relativos a la posibilidad, por parte de los

agentes de la policía municipal, de intentar acuerdos de recomposición por medio de la mediación y de firmar pactos de convivencia.

- en tercer lugar, seguir con el estudio de campo de las criticidades y buenas prácticas en entornos potencialmente multilingüísticos y multiculturales (educativo, socio-sanitario, jurídico);
- finalmente, seguir con el estudio sobre la calidad percibida de intérpretes en prácticas en contextos sociales y de interpretación consecutiva.

Para más información sobre los diferentes ámbitos del proyecto, remitimos al sitio del proyecto de investigación ([www.iberistica.unige.it](http://www.iberistica.unige.it)) y al trabajo coordinado por De Luise & Morelli, 2012. Por lo que se refiere al ámbito educativo, donde no operamos en primera persona, reenviamos a los trabajos más recientes de las componentes del grupo de investigación genovés (Ariolfo, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Carpani, 2010; Sanfelici, 2011).

Todos los proyectos se están llevando a cabo gracias a la financiación de la Fondazione San Marcellino ONLUS, obra de los jesuitas que se ocupa de personas sin hogar en Génova, de la Universidad de Génova y a la participación de las instituciones locales (Comune di Genova, Provincia di Genova y Regione Liguria).

## **2. El ámbito socio-sanitario**

Fue el primero que indagamos, justamente porque creemos que las dificultades de comprensión intralingüísticas e interlingüísticas se pueden apreciar mejor en un contexto donde el que está pidiendo (desgraciadamente ya identificado en nuestro país con el término un poco infeliz de “usuario”) se está “jugando algo” y, más concretamente, en una situación de emergencia. Por estas razones, y por el hecho de saber de antemano que en Génova prácticamente ninguna consulta médica en Urgencias estaba mediada con la presencia de un mediador o de un intérprete profesional o por personal debidamente formado, decidimos dedicarnos a una recogida de datos en los tres mayores hospitales públicos de Génova y, más concretamente, en las unidades de Urgencias. Seguimos este método: en una primera fase, les entregamos el cuestionario sobre conocimiento de lenguas extranjeras y su experiencia de trabajo con intérpretes y mediadores al personal médico-enfermero y a los ATS de los hospitales implicados en nuestra investigación. Recolectamos 129 cuestionarios de esta primera fase y realizamos 13 entrevistas profundizadas a médicos y enfermeros que habían rellenado

previamente el cuestionario y que pertenecían todos al mismo hospital (E.O. Ospedali Galliera). De hecho, esta estructura hospitalaria es la que, a lo largo de estos años, se ha demostrado la más sensible e interesada en nuestra investigación (véase también los trabajos llevados a cabo por el director de la unidad de Urgencias de este hospital y sus colaboradores y presentados con ocasión de nuestros congresos de mediación organizados en 2009 y 2010 en Génova (Cremonesi et al., 2011; Roccati et al., 2011). Las entrevistas profundizaron algunos de los datos surgidos de los cuestionarios, sobre todo por lo que atañe a los aspectos culturales y lingüísticos de la relación entre el personal médico y los pacientes. De esta primera fase de experiencia de investigación de campo cabe resaltar el fuerte interés y la participación del personal médico-sanitario, así como su deseo de aprender idiomas, pero, también la confirmación de la escasa o nula utilización de mediadores o intérpretes, que no sean ad hoc o naturales, en sus consultas. Los resultados más detallados de esta fase se pueden recuperar en un trabajo publicado por Morelli (2008b). La segunda fase del proyecto implicó a los pacientes y fue ahí donde tardamos mucho en obtener la autorización de uno de los tres hospitales genoveses implicados en el proyecto (más de cinco meses). La idea era la de entregarles un cuestionario a los pacientes a punto de darse de alta de Urgencias: una investigadora del grupo estaba presente en la unidad y les contactaba al terminar la consulta médica. El cuestionario, muy breve para evitar elevados porcentajes de rechazo a rellenarlo, contiene preguntas relativas a la utilización de los servicios sanitarios públicos (médicos de cabecera u hospitales), percepción del estado de salud y anímico del extranjero, trato recibido en el hospital, comprensión de lo comunicado por el personal médico-enfermero, eventual presencia de un mediador/intérprete en la consulta. De esta fase recogimos 199 cuestionarios (que en realidad nadie rellenó autónomamente sino que se convirtieron en entrevistas guiadas donde, además de brillar por su ausencia la presencia del mediador/intérprete (0%), destaca el elevado porcentaje de satisfacción de los pacientes al trato recibido y el elevado grado de comprensión de la información recibida. Dato que, en el caso de los no italianos, nos deja algo perplejos ya que, en muchos casos, los entrevistados ni siquiera entendían lo que se les estaba preguntando. En el mismo periodo (2010) intentamos recuperar datos de los mediadores genoveses para entender mejor qué formación tienen, dónde operan con más frecuencia, con qué grado de conocimiento por parte de los proveedores de servicios, en qué condiciones, etc. Desgraciadamente solo 10 mediadores de los 50 (aproximadamente) reunidos en una cooperativa genovesa que gestionaba la casi totalidad de los servicios públicos (Cooperativa S.A.B.A.) rellenaron nuestro cuestionario.

Todos los cuestionarios (tanto los del personal como de los pacientes y los de los mediadores) se pueden bajar del sitio [www.iberistica.unige.it](http://www.iberistica.unige.it), Ambito Socio-Sanitario, Materiale del Gruppo di Lavoro.

Asimismo, se están cruzando los datos obtenidos dentro de los hospitales con los que se obtienen del mismo cuestionario dirigido a pacientes fuera de las estructuras hospitalarias. En concreto: enviamos un cuestionario en red a un grupo muestrario de potenciales pacientes italianos con características análogas a los sujetos entrevistados durante los periodos de observación (200 contactos; 60 cuestionarios rellenados) y a la vez les entregamos el cuestionario a sujetos “puente” para los pacientes no italianos (asociaciones y personas activas en el territorio genovés, como el Coordinamento Ligure Donne Latinoamericane (COLIDOLAT), Laboratorio Migrazioni, algunos mediadores, etc.). Gracias también a un proyecto de fin de carrera de una estudiante de nuestra facultad (Pedriali, 2011) conseguimos recoger más cuestionarios específicamente dirigidos a personas latinoamericanas. Actualmente contamos con 68 cuestionarios rellenados fuera de los hospitales por no italianos y estamos analizando los datos (véase De Hériz & Morelli, 2010 y en prensa; De Hériz et al., 2012, para el desglose de estos datos).

Cabe realzar el valioso aporte de la investigación gracias a los proyectos de fin de carrera de nuestros estudiantes que nos permiten bien incrementar nuestra muestra (como en el caso de Pedriali ya citado); bien replicar el estudio en otros hospitales o con otros pares de lengua (trabajo en los consultorios genoveses de Rafanelli, 2009 y de Bruschettini en 2009 con el personal del hospital pediátrico Giannina Gaslini de Génova por lo que se refiere a la parte del cuestionario al personal médico y enfermero y, en el caso de Bruschettini, a un análisis comparado de recurso a intérpretes/mediadores de lengua española y de lengua rusa; o replicar el estudio en otras ciudades (Scopa, 2009, en Olbia y Di Mattei, 2012, en Palermo). Por lo que se refiere a este segundo estudio, cabe indicar que el cuestionario fue entregado tanto al personal como a los pacientes y a los mediadores, abarcando, por lo tanto, en un único trabajo, a todos los destinatarios de nuestro proyecto.

Nuestra labor de recogida de datos a través del cuestionario no se detiene, porque tiene sentido seguir actualizando los datos y monitorizando el territorio, mientras tanto, el propio hospital más sensible a nuestra investigación introdujo, a comienzos de 2010, un servicio de interpretación telefónica, sin consultar prácticamente con el personal ni con nosotros. El servicio, muy costoso para la empresa, parece ser muy poco utilizado, por lo menos por los datos que el servicio de atención al público nos brindó en junio de 2011: 148 llamadas totales en 18 meses. Las lenguas más utilizadas son, en orden decreciente: árabe, alemán, francés,

inglés, bangla, chino y wolof (de 16 a 10 llamadas). Las unidades que más utilizaron el servicio son las siguientes: Urgencias (28 llamadas), Enfermedades Infecciosas (22), Ginecología (20) y Neonatología (18).

Uno de los pasos futuros de nuestro proyecto será el de actualizar estos datos e intentar ahondar la percepción de la calidad del servicio por parte tanto del personal como de los pacientes.

Un aspecto de especial interés es la realización de grupos focales con mujeres extranjeras para profundizar algunos aspectos presentes en los cuestionarios o surgidos en las fases anteriores de nuestro trabajo.

De esta parte de trabajo nos gustaría, en esta sede, compartir algunos datos relativos al colectivo latinoamericano en Génova, tanto por lo que se refiere a los datos sacados de los cuestionarios dentro de los hospitales como fuera, agregando algunas reflexiones procedentes de los tres grupos focales llevados a cabo con mujeres latinoamericana.

El número de cuestionarios rellenados por latinoamericanos es de 74, de los cuales 17 dentro de los hospitales y 57 fuera. Como nacionalidad, la mayoría es ecuatoriana, lo cual confirma la tendencia demográfica genovesa. Por lo que se refiere a la utilización de los servicios sanitarios, de 74, 64 afirman haber acudido a su médico de cabecera (86,4%) y 42 (56,7%) también a un hospital. Por lo que atañe a la percepción de estado anímico, cabe notar que hay varias respuestas negativas: 4 se declaran muy nerviosos y 16 nerviosos, 33 tristes (un total de 41,9%), mientras que, en cuanto al estado de salud, 11 declaran sentirse peor con respecto a cuando vivían en su país y 26 dicen que a menudo tienen problemas de salud (lo que equivale a un 50% del total).

La mayoría de los encuestados afirman haber recibido mucha atención en las consultas sanitarias; elevado es también el grado de comprensión de la información recibida, tanto escrita como oral: solo el 5,4% para el escrito y el 4,1% para el oral declaran haber entendido poco y el 13,5% afirma que las palabras utilizadas eran difíciles, mientras que el 8,1% define incomprensibles las palabras utilizadas. El 24,3% declara haber entendido en parte, mientras que el 2,7% nada.

Por lo tanto, estos datos, revelan una comprensión muy elevada de la lengua utilizada en los servicios sanitarios locales, lo cual puede justificar la ausencia de mediadores/intérpretes en las visitas. Es cierto que casi la mayoría (45,4%) fue acompañada por alguien (pariente o amigo).

En cuanto a los grupos focales, participaron un total de nueve mujeres procedentes de los países siguientes: Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Brasil, México y Venezuela.



La edad media de las participantes es bastante baja: 31 años. Esto se debe a que la mitad de ellas contestó a un mensaje enviado a través de la plataforma didáctica de la facultad a nuestras estudiantes. En cambio, aunque la acogida recibida y el interés demostrado por parte del ya mencionado COLIDOLAT (Coordinamento Ligure Donne Latinoamericane) fueron considerables, la efectiva participación de mujeres procedentes de esta sede, tanto en los grupos focales como en la recopilación de cuestionarios fue bastante limitada: tres personas en los grupos focales y diez cuestionarios rellenos. Este es uno de los problemas que estamos teniendo a la hora de implicar activamente a la gente en nuestra investigación, pero que parece constituir un poco la tónica en este tipo de estudios de campo.

Cabe destacar que el mismo cuestionario enviado a 35 compañeros/as no italianos de nuestra facultad, de momento ha recibido respuesta solo por parte de dos personas.

Regresemos a los grupos focales: en dos casos, como su lengua nativa era común, las participantes optaron por hablar en español. La autora de este artículo estuvo presente como moderadora en todos los grupos focales. Los instrumentos de recogida de información fueron dos: la grabación de audio y las notas de campo tomadas durante las reuniones por la investigadora.

Como ya dijimos, los temas que se trataron durante los grupos focales son básicamente cinco e intentan ahondar y cruzar los datos que tenemos a disposición, tanto de los cuestionarios/entrevistas al personal médico como de las entrevistas a los pacientes. Aquí van los temas tratados: una comparación general del servicio sanitario entre su país e Italia; una comparación entre la relación que tienen con su médico de cabecera y los médicos especialistas o en los hospitales; una comparación entre el trato recibido por parte de los médicos y de los enfermeros en el hospital; el componente cultural en la comunicación médica; el componente lingüístico en la comunicación médica, sobre todo cuando las personas acababan de llegar a Italia.

Si volvemos al guión de los grupos focales, a la pregunta sobre la comparación entre su país e Italia, las mujeres suelen contestar alabando mucho el sistema público italiano, sobre todo, comparado con el equivalente de su país. Lo que valoran más positivamente es el hecho de tener derecho a una atención gratuita básica de calidad en muchos casos, algo que no parece ser la tónica en sus países.

La segunda pregunta, relativa a las posibles diferencias de trato y de relación entre su médico de cabecera y los médicos especialistas o en los hospitales, pone de relieve la mayor confianza en el médico de cabecera, que se convierte en la “figura de referencia” y en el “soporte”. Cabe destacar que en el debate sobre este tema aparece el interesante aspecto de los

médicos italianos vistos por los propios italianos como “seres de raza superior”, “en un pedestal”, mientras que en los países representados en nuestros grupos focales no parecen gozar de la misma consideración.

El debate sobre el tercer tema, la potencial diferencia entre el trato y la relación con el personal médico y con los enfermeros u operadores sanitarios en el hospital, confirma lo que ya observamos en la primera etapa de nuestra investigación, durante las entrevistas a médicos y a enfermeros. La percepción por parte de las mujeres de los grupos focales es de efectiva mayor humanidad, más trato y mejor comunicación con los enfermeros. Sin embargo, reconocen también que eso “es normal” ya que los médicos están ahí para hacer “otras cosas”. Todas lamentan lo críptico y excesivamente sintético que son las comunicaciones de los médicos a los pacientes o a los acompañantes después de una intervención y, más en general, el poco tiempo que los médicos pasan con los pacientes.

El tema de lo cultural en la comunicación médica despertó mucho interés por parte de las participantes, pero tuvo que ser moderado mucho por parte de la investigadora. De hecho, se mezclaba mucho el componente lingüístico con lo cultural, entonces, en dos casos, tuvimos que anticipar que lo lingüístico sería la última pregunta. Algunas “pinceladas” de lo que surgió de estos últimos dos aspectos: por lo general, se reitera siempre que, como los italianos y los latinoamericanos “somos parecidos”, no se producen muchos problemas de comunicación en este ámbito; se afirma que el problema no estriba en la diferencia de lengua sino en la diferencia de registro y en la terminología: la jerga médica suele ser incomprensible a un lego también en su lengua nativa; no se destaca una cuantiosa experiencia de recurrir a “remedios caseros” o de incumplir los tratamientos. Es más: en numerosas afirmaciones surge la idea de que son los italianos los que más creen en las recetas caseras o que bien toman medicamentos sin saber bien qué son. Nos parece interesante la experiencia de una mujer brasileña como mediadora, recién llegada a Italia, entre los médicos italianos y sus suegros del sur de Italia: paradójicamente, la “extranjera” se convirtió en la única que parecía entender y podía llevar a cabo la conversación.

Una última experiencia que consideramos realmente un botón de muestra es la de una argentina que cuenta que tuvo que acompañar a dar a luz a una amiga marroquí en un hospital público de Génova porque, aunque las dos amigas usan el italiano como lengua vehicular, en el hospital la mujer marroquí es como si ya no entendiera el italiano de los médicos y solo entiende a su amiga argentina hablándole en italiano. Es un ejemplo muy significativo de cómo la comunicación auténtica y eficaz se da solo cuando los interlocutores quieren que se dé, es

decir, cuando se da toda una serie de condiciones no meramente lingüísticas sino también afectivas y emocionales.

### **3. El ámbito jurídico-judicial**

La investigación en el ámbito judicial se introdujo en el proyecto en 2008. Los objetivos principales eran parecidos a los del ámbito sanitario: analizar si y cómo se estaban afrontando situaciones multilingües en el sector judicial y cómo se llevaba a cabo la comunicación escrita y oral dirigida a los extranjeros. Los primeros pasos en la investigación, a finales de 2008, se dedicaron a recoger datos y material con cuestionarios y entrevistas realizadas en el Tribunal de Génova y en la sede central de la Jefatura de policía, involucrando a abogados, jueces, fiscales, traductores e intérpretes y ciudadanos. También en este ámbito nos ayudaron los estudiantes de nuestra facultad (Agnorelli, 2009; Passerini, 2011) y también un trabajo llevado a cabo en Viena por Casaretto (2010).

El corpus a nuestra disposición no es nada cuantioso (unos 75 cuestionarios rellenados por abogados, unos 15 por clientes no italianos y 10 por mediadores), pero nos permite ya cruzar algunos datos con el ámbito sanitario que nos parecen de especial interés. Dedicaremos a este “cruce” algunas reflexiones en la parte final de este apartado.

De nuevo, se recurrió a un cuestionario centrado en los aspectos coincidentes, en la medida de lo posible, con los apartados del cuestionario entregado en el ámbito sanitario: datos personales, idiomas hablados en los tribunales de Génova, procedimientos de selección de traductores e intérpretes, percepción de los magistrados y abogados sobre el rol y las tareas llevadas a cabo por dichos mediadores, grado de satisfacción del trabajo realizados por ellos y criterios que se consideraban fundamentales para poder ofrecer un servicio adecuado.

En 2011 pasamos “manos a la obra”, firmando dos convenios entre nuestro departamento y el Tribunale di Genova. En un caso firmamos con los homólogos italianos de lo que podría ser en España la parte de Juzgados de instrucción, de primera instancia y de diligencias previas (en marzo) y (en noviembre) con el Servicio de Atención al Público. Los resultados de este año de trabajo, tanto de observación directa dentro de los juzgados como de prácticas dentro del Servicio de Atención al Cliente se detallan en una reciente publicación (Morelli, 2012).

Si cruzamos los datos relativos a la comprensión de los no italianos surgidos de los cuestionarios que se recogieron en el ámbito sanitario con los del ámbito jurídico, podemos destacar algo interesante. Reiterando que se refieren solo a 15 personas, de las cuales 8

ecuatorianas, un peruano, dos albaneses, dos senegaleses, una alemana y una francesa, cabe observar que los servicios a los que recurrieron en el último año fueron (posibilidad de respuestas múltiples): un 64,2% a lo administrativo; el 57,1% a lo penal, el 42,8% a lo civil y el 14,2% a otros servicios. Por lo que se refiere a la comprensión de la información recibida, recordamos que en el ámbito sanitario alrededor del 90% declara haber comprendido todo o casi todo y solo un 18,75% de los pacientes define “difíciles” las palabras utilizadas por el personal sanitario. Con las debidas cautelas de la diferencia en las muestras, quisiéramos destacar que, en cambio, en este ámbito solo el 28,6% declara haberlo entendido todo, mientras que un 57,2% afirma haber entendido solo parcialmente y el 14,2% contesta “nada” a esta pregunta.

Toda la información fue facilitada, igual que en lo sanitario, solo en italiano. Por lo que se refiere a la información escrita, un 35,7% declara haber entendido poco de la información recibida por abogados o magistrados, porcentaje que sube al 42,8% en el caso de información facilitada oralmente. En este ámbito nada menos del 42,8% de los entrevistados declaran que las palabras utilizadas son “difíciles” y un 21,4% las define “incomprensibles”. Aunque un 50% afirma que estaba solo durante la conversación con el personal jurídico-judicial, los demás reconocen en la persona que les acompañaba una importante función de ayuda lingüística (a diferencia de lo que vimos en lo sanitario). Otra diferencia, que ya esperábamos, es la presencia de un profesional (mediador o intérprete) que facilitara la comunicación con el personal y un 64,3% valora esta presencia como “muy útil” y un 7,1% la define “útil”. Interesante la respuesta “irrelevante” (siempre en el 7,1% de los casos) y el dato de no respuesta en un 21,5% de los entrevistados.

Será interesante enriquecer nuestra muestra para ver si estas tendencias se confirman.

#### **4. El proyecto de mediación comunitaria**

Pese a que se vea declinada en la práctica sobre todo con actividades e intervenciones sociales, la mediación comunitaria trae inspiración de múltiples disciplinas y puede brindar datos para investigaciones auténticamente interdisciplinarias, en el sentido de que, cada uno, en las interacciones dentro de la comunidad, en contextos controlados, puede detectar, acotar y, sucesivamente, aislar para analizar elementos concretos de interés del investigador sencillo o del grupo de investigación concreto para un proyecto concreto. De eso daremos una muestra a

continuación con un ejemplo, sacado justamente de una ocasión formativa del proyecto de mediación comunitaria.

En otras sedes esperamos haber asentado nuestros pilares teórico-metodológicos (De Luise & Morelli, 2009; De Luise & Morelli, 2010; De Luise & Morelli, 2012), por esto no haremos sino recalcar por enésima vez que la escucha, el diálogo (por más que interrumpido), la interacción (por perjudicada que resulte) y la narración constituyen los elementos clave de la mediación (que en muchos casos coinciden con los de la interpretación interlingüística).

El objetivo general del proyecto genovés de mediación comunitaria, que tuvo su génesis en 2010, con una ocasión formadora de cinco talleres de mediación (que se celebraron simultáneamente en Génova) dirigidos a profesionales e investigadores (un total de 80, cuya mayoría ya estaba trabajando en el territorio genovés, realizando tareas de asistentes y trabajadores sociales, médicos, psicólogos, etc.), es el de pasar a la praxis el enfoque cultural de la mediación que promueve la participación social y ciudadana, la convivencia intercultural y la transformación de los conflictos de destructivos a constructivos.

En 2011 empezamos la fase experimental, creando ocasiones de formación, donde el grupo que se formaría tenía que ser elegido y, por consiguiente, legitimado, por los que estarían o coordinarían los diferentes ámbitos de acción, y donde pudieran darse ocasiones de intercambios y también altercados, pero en un lugar “protegido”. Por esto, organizamos tres talleres en tres diferentes contextos: un micro-barrio genovés llamado Ghetto donde ya existe una Casa de Barrio fruto de un consorcio de asociaciones y de las financiaciones de un proyecto europeo, un taller dirigido a un grupo de funcionarios de la Policía Municipal y uno celebrado dentro de una escuela secundaria de primer grado de un barrio periférico genovés con un grupo integrado por diferentes actores: profesores del propio colegio y de otros, mediadores interculturales, investigadores, operadores sociales y deportivos, orientadores y psicólogos, etc. Un detalle de este año de trabajo se encuentra en el trabajo de De Luise & Morelli (2012), ya citado. En esta sede nos interesa centrarnos en un ejemplo de material riquísimo para estudiar los temas de la construcción de la identidad en la narración, procedente de las grabaciones vídeo realizadas durante los talleres del Ghetto.

El taller de marzo de 2011 se articuló en dos días de trabajo y el grupo que se formó fue bastante “fluido” y “poroso”, por así decirlo. De hecho, los coordinadores de la Casa de Barrio habían contactado con todas las realidades que integran el micro-barrio: las asociaciones (que trabajan en el tercer sector) que forman parte del proyecto financiado, llamado Ghatt-up), los trabajadores sociales que operan en este distrito, los representantes de las actividades que se llevan a cabo en la Casa de Barrio (laboratorio vídeo, taller de pintura, alfabetización de

italiano LE, etc.), los representantes de una mezquita (almacén usado como lugar de culto) que se encuentra delante de la Casa de Barrio, las representantes de la asociación de las travestís (italianas) que ejercen en este barrio desde más de cuarenta años, los vecinos, etc. Sin embargo, como la Casa de Barrio se asoma a la calle con muchas ventanas y la propia puerta de acceso, fueron muchas las personas que, al pasar por ahí, entraron, se quedaron una media hora, media jornada, etc., dándoles gran dinamismo y flexibilidad al grupo y a los trabajos del taller. De antemano sabíamos que uno de los conflictos más crudos era justamente el que confronta a los dos últimos “grupos”: los que atienden a la mezquita y las transgender. Decidimos no encarar directamente el conflicto durante el taller y ver si surgía del grupo en formación. Así fue: el primer día de taller estaban presentes tanto una de las representantes del grupo Princesa de las transexuales como el basurero de la zona, que es también no italiano e islámico. Tuvieron un altercado bastante fuerte sobre “el conflicto” que no habíamos encarado y entonces, algo cambió en el grupo y “estalló”, como si el episodio no hubiera sido más que un detonador. Al día siguiente, se presenta una persona mayor, un vecino del barrio, que no había participado el día antes y no sabía qué había pasado. Con gran espontaneidad, pide la palabra y empieza una narración que dura solo cinco minutos pero que es de una intensidad tremenda desde el punto de vista discursivo. A continuación, algunos fragmentos traducidos al español y algunas reflexiones sobre esta intervención. La persona empieza a hablar con énfasis, pero calma y cuenta de cómo en los años sesenta “llegaron las primeras travestís [...] estaba prohibido en aquel entonces. Era una novedad la gente les aceptaba porque eran simpáticas [...] Fueron las guardias de nuestros hijos nadie se atrevía a fastidiar a un niño. Ellas cuidaban a nuestros hijos. Dios las bendiga...desde este punto de vista”. En seguida le devuelve la dignidad a una de las “partes” implicadas en el conflicto, sin saber que el día antes había estallado. El hombre sigue su narración, con un fuerte acento genovés y continúa con el cuento de lo que era el barrio: “Empezó el deterioro, la droga [...] la gente con dinero compró las casas por nada, “por un puño de castañas” (lo dice en dialecto genovés). Aquí había muchas actividades: un sastre, un verdulero, uno que vendía hormigón...Se vivía. Y había también respeto. Hoy no nos conocemos”. Bien se nota el paso del pasado al presente, donde el primero está caracterizado por la vivacidad del barrio, la “vida”, el respeto, mientras que el presente pasa de lo impersonal a lo personalizado: “hoy no nos conocemos”. La falta de conocimiento como el primer germen de una posible in(comprensión).

La narración sigue en impersonal, pero en seguida pasa a la primera persona plural, con sentimiento de implicación: “Reunir a la gente del barrio es muy importante para que nos conozcamos y para aceptar...”. Y luego una gran sorpresa para todos los que no habían

conocido antes a este hombre que parece, por el acento, un abuelo genovés: “Yo soy un inmigrante, vengo de Túnez [...]. No hay raza, no hay religión, no hay color: somos todos iguales. El primer enunciado se pronuncia como si fuera debido, como si fuera un “Ah, sí, claro, no lo he dicho, pero yo también soy un inmigrante”. Primera personal singular, para luego pasar a lo impersonal “hay”, repetido tres veces, pero para cerrar con una primera persona plural que, de nuevo, le devuelve dignidad a todo el mundo y también al otro “enfrentamiento” del conflicto (el narrador asiste también a la mezquita).

La narración sigue con la alternancia de “lo malo” (degrado, deterioro, capitalismo, droga) y de “lo bueno” (“Era un barrio cálido, popular [...] nos conocíamos todos [...] nunca cerrábamos las puertas”), para pasar luego, de repente a la dura realidad, contada como impersonal: “Hoy se drogan en el portal [...] Te destornillan la puerta [...]. Yo ya no ando [...] te tiran ahí para robarte dos euros”). Pero, otra vez, vuelve la esperanza, se abre una rendija de sol en la narración: “Esperemos que ahora con este evento que han hecho [...] es una cosa muy linda”. En el primer enunciado no parece haber una implicación (“este evento que han hecho” y se queja también de no haber sido avisado antes de que se celebraría), lo mismo que en el enunciado siguiente: “Intenten reunirnos”, pero donde el Ustedes y el Nosotros ya se juntan, para luego pasar, a involucrarse con un coral “Nosotros”: “intentemos defender el barrio [...] intentemos defender a la población [...] es realmente algo muy bonito”. Siguen los agradecimientos, las disculpas por la memoria que falla, la conmoción de él y de todos los presentes. Cinco minutos de gran intensidad que reconstruyen la historia del barrio y les devuelven dignidad a todos. Con el lenguaje.

2012 nos está ocupando, también en primera persona como estudiantes, en un curso básico de sensibilización a la mediación comunitaria en el que participan 70 operadores del territorio genovés que desempeñan diferentes tareas: operadores sociales privados, asistentes sociales del ayuntamiento, mediadores interculturales, psicólogos, investigadores, policías locales, etc. El formador es un experto en mediación argentino y las diez jornadas de interpretación están interpretadas por nuestros estudiantes en prácticas (véase apartado siguiente para el cruce de ámbitos y proyectos). Toda la formación se grabó en vídeo, lo cual constituirá material riquísimo para nuestras investigaciones sobre el uso de la lengua y de los lenguajes, las interacciones mediadas por el lenguaje y la investigación en interpretación consecutiva que a continuación vamos a describir brevemente.

## **5. El proyecto de análisis de la percepción de la calidad en interpretación consecutiva de estudiantes en prácticas**

En 2010 pusimos en marcha un estudio, basado en un detallado cuestionario (Errico & Morelli, en prensa), cuyo objetivo consiste en recoger y analizar datos relativos a la percepción de los destinatarios de un servicio de interpretación consecutiva facilitado por estudiantes en prácticas del curso de postgrado en Traducción e Interpretación de la Universidad de Génova, en ámbito social, y rellenado también como autoevaluación por parte de los propios estudiantes.

El corpus actualmente a nuestra disposición está integrado por los cuestionarios recogidos a lo largo de todo el proyecto de formación en mediación comunitaria (talleres arriba descritos y curso de sensibilización a la mediación comunitaria) y también en las jornadas que prevén la presencia de formadores españoles del Curso para Operadores con Personas sin Hogar organizado por la Fondazione San Marcellino ONLUS, en colaboración con la Universidad de Bolonia.

Se trata de unos 375 cuestionarios procedentes de 12 diferentes ocasiones formadoras que van de un mínimo de seis horas a un máximo de treinta horas y cinco jornadas de trabajo. En todos los casos disponemos de la grabación audio y, en el caso del curso en mediación comunitaria, como ya dijimos, también de las grabaciones vídeo.

El material es riquísimo ya que se pueden cruzar muchos datos: mismo ponente, diferentes intérpretes y diferentes destinatarios; mismo ponente, mismos destinatarios y diferentes intérpretes. Algunos intérpretes se pusieron a prueba en diferentes ocasiones y, según los destinatarios, la percepción de calidad fue muy diferente. Es cierto que en algunos casos se trata de problemas de tándem de trabajo (sintonía con el/la compañero/a de trabajo o bien considerable diferencia entre la calidad de un intérprete y el otro de la misma pareja de trabajo), pero es indudable también que hay ejemplos de estudiantes que sacaron muy buenas notas en los exámenes y, en cambio, no siempre fueron “bien acogidos” y evaluados igual de positivamente por los destinatarios del servicio o bien, intérpretes bastante “débiles” durante la formación que se “salvan” y reciben puntuaciones positivas por los destinatarios (a veces, también, gracias a la ayuda del compañero de tándem). Por lo general, las evaluaciones globales de nuestros estudiantes son buenas, tanto como se refiere al apartado “profesionalidad” como por lo que atañe la “actitud” y la calidad global.

Cabe destacar la dificultad por parte de los destinatarios de rellenar y evaluar algunos campos, como, por ejemplo, el de la “fidelidad con respecto al original” (campo que agregamos



en una fase sucesiva de nuestro estudio), la autoevaluación de los estudiantes suele ser más baja con respecto a las evaluaciones efectivamente recibidas por los destinatarios y cierta “exigencia” y “severidad” al evaluar por quiénes saben bien español (o declaran saberlo bien). Esto solo para dar una idea de este proyecto que bien se entrecruza con el anterior y que, también en este caso, une la investigación a lo profesional, a la didáctica y al territorio. Y, por razones de espacio, el círculo se cierra.

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## **THE FUNCTIONING OF THE IDIOMS REPRESENTING THE CONCEPT *WORK* IN THE CHECHEN LANGUAGE**

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### **Abstract**

The article considers the use of idioms representing the semantic field “work” in the Chechen language on the material of the psycholinguistic inquiry, the author analyses different aspects of the functioning of this layer of lexical system in speech.

### **Keywords:**

language situation, idioms, semantic field "work", psycholinguistic inquiry

## 1. Introduction

The language situation in the Chechen republic is characterized by a simultaneous coexistence of two differently structured languages close politically and territorially. As a result of such closeness influence of an official language of the state on a minority language is noticeable, the Chechen language appears in a risk zone, obvious semantic and structural transformations are observed, tendencies to speech mixture, preference to speak the Russian language. Within the limits of a current situation interesting was the research of such part of the lexical system of language as idiomatics, one of its fragments, describing work sphere. Such an approach to the problem in our opinion is justified as it gives the most objective picture about the use of idioms in the modern Chechen language.

We had conducted the inquiry of students at the Chechen State University and Grozny Oil Institute. Research covered various aspects of idioms functioning: social, sociolinguistic, linguistic, psycholinguistic.

The social aspect has been directed first of all on revealing interrelation between a social status of students (a residence, education of parents, age, plans for the future and social requirement for this or that language) and knowledge of Russian and Chechen languages. For full life of any language its functioning in all spheres of social institutes is necessary, otherwise there is its gradual replacement and disappearance. In the present the Chechen language lives only on the colloquial level, in a family and in streets, but has no place in educational, scientific, political, economic and other spheres. In this connection there is no versatile development of language and its dictionaries. The same picture develops with other languages of the North Caucasus. Such situation demands working out an alternative and the correct approach in language politics which would also consider involving the Chechen language into the scientific environment and knowledge of Russian.

The sociolinguistic aspect has reflected a language situation in republic, level of knowledge of the Chechen language. The linguistic part of the inquiry was a key component of research, revealing the use and behavior of idioms in the modern Chechen language. Within the limits of the semantic field "work" idioms were classified in taxa by inductive way, from a language material. Such taxa as «to work much, hard», «to work with enthusiasm», «diligence», «to begin working», «to finish work», «to earn», «to work little, badly» were allocated.

The psycholinguistic aspect has shown that the perception of idioms to some extent depends on the structure of the internal form, the more it is transparent, the clearer it is and there is more probability of various variants of their semantic interpretation.



## 2. Methodology

In the work such methods, as psycholinguistic inquiry, sociological, statistical, cognitive, semantic analysis, a method of continuous sample from dictionaries were applied. By the method of continuous sample idioms of the semantic field "work" have been selected from phraseological dictionaries of the Chechen language (Bajsultanov D., Bajsultanov D., 1992; Ibragimov, 2005). Questionnaire questions have been formulated so that the received results reflected psycholinguistic aspect, that is have been focused on perception. It allowed to investigate the ways of interpretation of idioms semantics during the analysis. Inquiry data has undergone the statistical analysis in program SPSS for Windows 14, revealing in a percentage ratio the degree of each idiom use. Cognitive and semantic analysis was used for examining properties of idioms in contexts, additional meanings, influence of images on an actual meaning.

## 3. The Analysis

### 3.1. Social and sociolinguistic aspects

The attitude to languages in a modern Chechen society, and also the language situation in the republic, connected with the tendency of influence of Russian on Chechen, causes a particular interest to researching the use of idioms by native speakers. The choice of the given layer of lexicon is motivated, firstly, by the fact, that the knowledge of idioms and their direct use in speech is frequently one of the indicators of high level of language knowledge, secondly, aspiration to trace the ways of their functioning in the modern Chechen language.

The object of research is the idioms of semantic field "work" in the Chechen language. The actuality of the subject is proved by necessity to reveal the degree of operating with idioms of an investigated semantic field in speech that also is considered to be more objective, than if idioms have been picked up from different fields.

The author interrogated 300 Chechen students of the Chechen State University and Grozny Oil Institute. The questionnaire developed by us «Idioms about work in the Chechen language» included 49 questions, covered 33 idioms chosen from different taxa of the semantic field "work".

Main blocks of questions of the questionnaire:

1. Knowledge of Russian
2. Knowledge of the Chechen language

3. Desire to know the Chechen language perfectly
4. Teaching the Chechen language at the university
5. The most demanded language
6. How often are idioms heard or used in speech (idioms of taxa «to work much, hard», «to work with enthusiasm », «diligence», «to begin working», «to finish work», «to earn», «to work little, badly»).
7. Education of parents
8. Age
9. Special subject
10. The course
11. The residence

Inquiry main objective consisted in collecting contexts with the Chechen idioms, to consider their use in speech. The carried out analysis has allowed to define the possession level of the Chechen language, to make a picture about a language situation in republic, to reveal the attitude to language, knowledge of idioms, operating with them, the semantic features shown in speech. The language situation in republic is characterized by penetration of Russian into informal colloquial-everyday sphere of communication, mixture of Russian and Chechen speech.

According to the inquiry, the percent freely knowing the Chechen language (51,6 %) has appeared a little higher, than Russian (49,2 %). 70 % of the interrogated students aspire to know the Chechen language perfectly and explain it in a greater degree (39,8 %) by fear of disappearance of language. In it the realization by young people of a language situation in republic, influences of Russian and its penetration into informal sphere of communication is traced. Nevertheless, 42,5 % not aspiring to know the Chechen language perfectly consider sufficient that are able to speak.

**Table 1. «How do you estimate your knowledge of Russian?»**

Variants of answers	Respondents
fluent	49,2
good	32,9
speak badly	2,8
understand, but don't speak	14,4
other	0,7
total	100

Despite prompt influence of Russian on the Chechen language, as a whole freely knowing Russian there was half from 100 %. So, the present population of the Chechen republic is basically the former inhabitants of villages. During the conflict and post conflict periods there was a stratification of the population of Grozny, outflow of inhabitants in different cities of Russia and abroad. In villages during the Soviet and Post-Soviet time teaching was conducted in the Chechen language and 100 % of the population made representatives of the Chechen nationality. The knowledge of Russian was insufficient and low, received on Russian and literature lessons, from reading books in Russian. At the moment in Grozny live 80 % of natives from villages. Preferable language of communication is Chechen, 98 % interrogated do not speak Russian in daily language practice. Nevertheless, among young men the tendency of communication in Russian is traced, it gets into the Chechen language that is shown in the mixed speech, in use of Russian words for denotation of those or other subjects and concepts.

For example, everywhere use Russian numbers, the Chechen numbers, since 20, use less frequently, especially among the young. Possibly, it is connected with a choice of the way from difficult to easy, to simplification. The Chechen numbers are more difficult.

**Table 2. «Do you aspire to know the Chechen language perfectly?»**

Variants of answers	Respondents
Yes	70,0
No	11,1
I find it difficult to answer	18,9
Total	100

**Table 3. «If do not aspire, why?»**

Variants of answers	Respondents
There is no strength of will	5,2
It is enough that I am able to speak	42,5
It is enough that I understand	14,5
There is no time	13,5
What else?	8,3
I find it difficult to answer	16,0
Total	100

The choice by the majority of the answer - enough that I am able to speak is caused by various factors. One of them is connected with how much language is claimed in a social sphere. As it is known, an official language of communication in republic and in the country is Russian, teaching is conducted in the given language and at work there is also no necessity to know the Chechen language, to write in the Chechen language reports, letters, to carry out actions. All operations, all work passes in Russian, except for separate channels of television and editions of magazines and newspapers. Thus, an important aspect of full existence of language is its place, demand for it in a society.

**Table 4. «If aspire to know the Chechen language perfectly, by what is it caused?»**

Variants of answers	Respondents
Influence and example of people around	28,5
The demand of relatives and friends	4,7
Fear that the Chechen language will disappear	39,8
What else?	10,5
I find it difficult to answer	16,4
Total	100

Language disappears under the influence of another language, being gradually forced out from the use. This process can proceed naturally, other language is not imposed, but makes a strong impact in view of its status in the country, changing lexical structure of language of minority and bringing changes. Other variant of aspiration to know the Chechen language was

that it is a native language, the language of the nation defining its socio-cultural self-identification.

«Is the Chechen language taught at your university, at your faculty?»

92 % have answered that the Chechen language is taught at the university. The Chechen language is taught at schools and is proceeded at the university on 1st, 2nd courses, accordingly pupils know written language bases.

As a whole by results of inquiry it is possible to estimate the knowledge of the Chechen language as above an average. The problem put at carrying out the inquiry, has been fulfilled, contexts with idioms have been collected in necessary for making an objective analysis volume.

### 3.2. *Linguistic aspect*

Thus, functioning of the Chechen idioms closely intertwines with social factors. So, many idioms leave the active use, become outdated, others on the contrary become frequent (for example, ахча даккха (lit. money to extract) - to "earn"). In the analyzed contexts the idiom *ахча дакккха* has meanings: 1) it is heavy to earn, 2) to work, to earn (at work), 3) to earn on bread.

Ахча даккха атта дац, хъанал даккха гуттара а. To earn money is not easy, but fair – always.

Ахча даккха болх бан беза, и бан хъекъал хила деза. To earn money it is necessary to work but to work, mind is necessary.

In many contexts the difficulty to earn if there is no education is underlined. One of the most often used idioms according to the inquiry (88,6 % heard and 65,3 % use) that is connected with the demand in modern society.

Inquiry of informants has allowed to reveal both semantic properties of idioms in speech, and a fragment of a current state of the Chechen language (one of its subsystems - phraseological).

Results of research have shown that:

- Idioms with archaic grammatical and semantic structure are less often used and not recognized by native speakers.

- Idioms with the transparent inner form semantically variable, find out polysemy, in contexts get additional meanings that grows out of influence of the inner form on an actual meaning.
- Idioms with the transparent inner form syntactically are not steady, in contexts are exposed to violation of phraseological unity
- Cultural-specific idioms are defined by native speakers depending on the presence of background cultural knowledge.

The analysis shows that some idioms are almost unrecognizable and not used. Idioms with less transparent semantic structure are badly distinguished and less often met in colloquial contexts. For example, 5 % often heard an idiom *са бага кхача (кхаъчна) / бага са а кхаъчна*. The idiom *са бага кхача* as inquiry shows, is seldom used and the main meaning «to be tired of smth., doing smth.». Only in one context it is mentioned in reference to work.

Са де ваша *са бага а кхаъчна* къа хьогъуш ву, ше доъзал кхаба г1ерташ.

My uncle (the daddy's brother) *works, without being tired*, trying to support the family.

10,7 % heard the idiom *оьна яккха санна*. Meanings of the idiom in contexts: 1) to work in study (to learn), 2) to sit down for something (for any employment), not necessarily for work. As inquiry shows, the idiom is used rather seldom and leaves everyday language, passing into the passive stock of language reflected in the dictionary.

*Оьна яккха санна чувовлла* 1амош вара 1ела. Iela have been learning *without raising the head*.

Б1аьстенан дийнахь стоьмийн синтар д1адог1а латта охкуш, *оьна яккха санна юха ца волуш, чувовлла* иза. In the spring afternoon, he *has steeped in work*, digging up the earth for tree planting.

Thus a ratio, how often native speakers heard and use idioms in speech, does not coincide. The percent of how often heard, half exceeds percent of frequency of the use. It can be caused by unwillingness to think out contexts, implicit language knowledge when the native speaker does not realize or does not notice that he uses this or that expression and how often, imperfect mastery of a language, gradual reduction of use of those or other idioms in colloquial practice, age of interrogated - 72,3 % - from 16-20 years.

Idioms with a more transparent inner form found out variations of meanings, polysemy – *сийна клур эkkхийтана*, 70,4% often heard this idiom, 42,3% often use.

The idiom as contexts have shown, is used in following meanings:

- 1) to work with might and main, actively,
- 2) to do affairs about the house (to sweep etc.),
- 3) to kick up dust, smoke (about the car, a horse),
- 4) to set fire, make a fire,
- 5) to quarrel.

*Сийна кIур эkkхийтана болх баре терра, делкъале бевлира мехкарий болх чекх баьккхина.*

As the girls have *actively started to work*, so till dinner they have finished the work.

Also such idioms are prone to violation of phraseological unity - *гIуллакх дIакхехъа*, 57,3% often heard, 36% often use.

Бахархойн *гIуллакх* тIе а лавцна, и *дIакхехъа* кийча а, доьналла долуш вара юрт-да. The head of village was the courageous person, ready to incur business of people.

The idiom *куьйгаи ца satsosh/охъа ца доьккуи* (41,2% often heard, 26% often use) has meanings: 1) to work without being tired (Physical work in a kitchen garden, about the house, at work), 2) to do something without being tired (to write, count, clap hands).

Сатасле хъала а гIавттина, *куьйгаи охъа ца доьккуи* гIуллакхаш деш яра керла нус.

Having risen at daybreak, the new daughter - in-law *nonstop was busy* about the house.

Сацитас *куьйгаи ца сацои* беш охку. Sacita is digging up a garden, *nonstop*.

The idiom *дечунна мало йир йоцуи* (56,4% often heard, 34,2% often use) in contexts is used in the meaning «the hardworking person (more often in relation to the woman)».

Ахъа деш долу гIуллакх мало ца еш дича, *дечунна тIера* хуьлу. If you carry out the business without feeling sorry for forces, you are hardworking.

*Дечунна мало йир йоцуи* дика нус ю тхан. We have a good daughter - in-law who is very *hardworking*.

Other synonymous idioms *балхан тIера*, *кхъахъега мало ца еш* in contexts have meanings: 1) hardworking, loving work, 2) to work without feeling sorry for forces.

Дуьненах ваха лаахъ *балхан тIера* хила веза, кхъахъега мало ца еш.

If you want to live well, it is necessary *to be hardworking* and to work without feeling sorry for forces.

The idiom *куьйгаи Iummapx* (31,2% often heard, 18% often use) in contexts has meanings: 1) «to work not much, do not try, to work easily », 2) «to work little by little to do something (about the house, with car, in a kitchen garden, with positive connotation)».

*Куьйгаи Iummapx* г1уллакх хир дац, дика т1еверза веза хьо хьан белхан. If you *rummage in*, business will not go, you need to undertake the work well.

In the contexts received during the inquiry, the meaning of the Chechen idiom *лол бетта* follows from the inner form and is used in its dictionary meaning «to work somehow, negligently» as well as in the meaning «to work hard; to work, to earn», in this case corresponds to Russian *тянуть лямку*, 43,4% often heard the idiom, 20,7% often use. Probably, interrogated leant against the direct reading connected with sewing business which is considered laborious and difficult.

Х1ора а шен *лол беттаи* шен рицкъ доккхуш ву. Everyone works, earning himself on livelihood.

И йоккха стаг хала *лол беттаи* шен довзал кхаба г1ерта. An old woman *works hard*, trying to provide for her family.

The actual meaning of the idiom follows from its image component and touches first of all the seme “much work”. In the contexts the variation of form is possible. So in the given context to the form, fixed in the dictionary the component болх “work” is added – *ги боьттина болх*. The combination of the idiom with other lexemes gives different meanings, but the main sense stress remains on the seme – “very much”.

The meaning of culturally specific idioms with oblique inner form was defined with reference to the component structure and such idioms were considered not so familiar, seldom used. Thus not all informants could correctly understand the meaning of the culturally marked idiom *Абубешаран болх* (lit. Abubeshar work – «easy work») and define the source of the cultural component – proper name (expression from the play of A.H. Hamidov «Abubeshar»). Only 10 % interrogated often heard the given expression, 26,3 % - seldom heard, 57,7 % - never heard; 5,4 % - often use, 18,1 % - seldom, 67,4 % - never use. Nevertheless, in contexts the actual meaning has been correctly defined and followed from the internal form though oblique, idioms scornful, negative connotation has been understood. In some contexts into the dictionary meaning of the idiom «easy work» was introduced the seme «negligent, bad work».

Хьайн болх *Абубешаран болх* санна эрна байна ма хилийталахъ.

Let your work will not be made in vain, as *work of Abubeshar*.



Thus, inquiry is an actual method of research of a current state of language, analysis of idioms semantics within the limits of one language, consideration of peculiarities of perception and representation of idioms meanings within one linguistic community.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In spite of the fact that the obtained data cannot be considered absolutely representative, sample from more than 300 informants gives an idea of the existing tendency, developing laws. Important there is also a supervision over perception of the idioms characterized by figurativeness. Such analysis reveals theoretical characteristics of idioms as a class of phraseological units. The language situation demands attention, working out the projects on popularization and improvement of knowledge of the Chechen language. Inquiry has shown that many idioms are used not so often and are unfamiliar to young representatives of the Chechen people while the group of people of the senior generation knew the meaning of these idioms, that is some idioms leave the active use. Idiomaticity is considered to be one of the indicators of the level of mastery of a language. The actual meaning of unfamiliar idioms was interpreted with support on component structure and the inner form.

Interesting is the fact that in such cases different informants deduced identical meaning of idioms. Students of the first courses have shown a bigger activity, diligence and knowledge at questionnaire filling, as well as students of Faculty of the Chechen philology. Certain group of students did not know written Chechen language as lived in cities of Russia.

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## **LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY ON MATCHMAKING DISCOURSE (JAVANESE AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES)**

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### **Abstract**

Matchmaking is one of unique phenomena in Indonesian society, primarily in Javanese culture. It is said unique as it does not always happen in all circumstances. Religious consideration, shyness among both parties or one of them (either boy or girl), are factors to be match-made . Matchmaking is usually performed by the one having a closed relationship with both boy and girl considering to start a serious relationship. In this article, matchmaking is elaborated in the context where one of the parties is typical of a shy girl. The match maker is the girl's relative who facilitated 'relationship establishment' with the writer. It is done through chatroom as the writer and the matchmaker were in a faraway distance (different countries). As the girl being mediated, match maker, and writer are from the same province having the same religion (Islam), the discourses performed were highly connected to the ethnic background, and Islamic discourses as the value system. In the case of Javanese perspective, the factors such as profession, wealth, religion and education are considered the satus of Individual Javanese (Dhofier, 1980). While, in Islamic teaching, having a religious husband or wife is highly recommended (see. [www.islamweb.net](http://www.islamweb.net)). The interplay of these discourses highly govern the chatting interaction.

### **Keywords**

Javanese identity, Islamic discourse, value system, matchmaking and marriage

## 1. Background theory

Identity is a sort of a fluid characteristic of someone. Seen in this way as it is changing, actively constructed and co-constructed as well as gaining recognition by others through interaction. Furthermore, identity is reciprocally constructed in someone's entire life (Paltridge, 2006; Cameron, 2001; Thornborrow, 1999; Gee, 2005). Blommaert (2005) states that identity is 'what and who you are' (p.203). This can be seen through the involvement in diverse activities (individually, socially, institutionally) with regard to certain roles being assigned which enables someone to have multi identities (Thornborrow, 1999). Further, these identities can also be observable through the language used, dressing (multi-modal activities), communities in which he/she is in, and constructed through the use of discourse (Paltridge, 2006). Thus the same person may be displayed as lecturer, a religious man, husband, mother, princess etc. In a broader scope, Identities can be reflected through gender, class, national identity etc (Delanty 2003 cited in Block 2006a).

In this article, the discussion is mostly focused on Javanese ethnic identity and Islamic discourses and less discussion on the features of gendered languages in the process of 'relationship matchmaking'

The emphasis on ethnic identity is due to the fact that the most parts in writer's chat were about belief system and religion. Block (2006b cited in Ominiya and White, 2006) describes that ethnic based identity covers 'a shared history, belief system, practices, language and religion, all associated with cultural group' (p. 39). More specifically, this article will deal more with practices and theory of Javanese and Islamic Discourses as the matchmaker and the writer are from this background. These two factors are important in matchmaking as they are regarded as the indicator of successful marriage process. Nilan (2008) mentioned that faith, family and finances are three prominent factors for successful marriage in Indonesia. Bütünheim & Nobles (2009) mention that 'adat (local ethnic) norms are strong predictors of marriage behaviour' in Indonesia (p.277). This is what might Hofstede (1998) includes as *value system*, the way in which individuals or group of individuals organise their ethical and ideological values. The case of Javanese norms and Islamic discourses govern *spouse choice* might indicate this *value system*.

On the other hand, writer's concern is in the chat room languages. This will describe the features of how generally man and woman use the language (Lakoff 1970s cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Litosseliti, 2006; Tannen, 1990; Tannen 1998) that woman tend to use *question tag, hedges, boosters or amplifiers, indirection, diminutives, euphemism* etc, and man

tend to use *more interruption, more assertions* etc. But as the chat is from Yahoo Messenger which was not audio recorded, the pitch, intonation etc can not be explained and yet the language use was also constrained to technical properties through the use of emoticon. The use of emoticon may be to show digital presence (Thomas, 2004) as well as ‘conversational coherence and communicative register’ (Greenfield and Subrahmanyam, 2003, p. 713).

## **2. The profile of data**

The data was taken on March 23, 2010 through Yahoo Messenger, in which Indonesian language was used. The participants involved the writer himself and his match maker, Sara (pseudonym). She was 26 year old young woman who mediated the writer with her relative. Sara and the writer are both from the same Javanese cultures and of the same religion as well (Islam). Thus, the language used in this ‘negotiation process’ works within the framework of those variables. The chat contains the writer’s plan to propose ‘love’ to her relative (26 year old age girl). The mediation is required as her cousin is a kind of ‘shy’ girl, the case which is common in Javanese culture, especially those from conservative family. Blommaert (2005) says that ‘dating or developing friendships involve *intricate narratives* about ones’ self and request for such narratives from the interlocutor, a matter of getting to know one another’ (p.203). Therefore, due to the typically of being ‘shy’ girl, the matchmaking is necessary. The patterns in the data mostly denote the dominant variables of Javanese culture and religious Islamic discourse in relation with spouse choice. While other variable which is man and woman language is partially shown as the text is only written one done through chatroom in which the nature of conversation itself may be constrained.

## **3. Discussions on ethnic identity from the perspective of Javanese culture and Islamic discourse)**

The use of language is really governed by the context of discussion and the relationship between the speakers. Ideological orientations also shape the nature of the chatting as the writer and the matchmaker hold the same religion. These factors interplay each other in the writer’s chatting with her. See the following conversations:

**Excerpt A**

- Writer: doing assignments?
- Sara: No, but is about to go, purchasing my friend's baby's need.
- Writer: ok if that's the case...go a head (do it)...
- Sara: having just finished chatting with my relative)?
- Writer: not yet, I already sent messages to her FB inbox to be on-line in Yahoo Messenger but seems that she is in bad mood.
- Sara: ooo...often on-line?
- Writer: if we appear to be on-line at the same time, we chat in Yahoo Messenger as via Facebook, many intruders are coming'
- Sara: often?
- Writer: depending on her visiting to internet rental...(the place where can rent internet)

In the above chat, it can be seen that Sara is clarifying whether the writer was chatting with her relative as her relative that time was also on-line. Her questions about the frequency of our chatting might imply her attention of writer's intimate-relationship with her relative. While the writer's responses signal that the writer is concerned with his relationship by stating that he always initiates the chat with her elder relative and his being considerate to accept her not willingness to talk. Yet, it is in Javanese culture that a boy establishing relationship with a girl usually takes initiative and then the girl responses. If the girl initiates first, it is considered being *impolite* and it *violates* the norm in Javanese culture. These might reflect Javanese speech pattern which links to 'social structural variables such as patterns of socialization, model of appropriate male and female linguistic behavior, men and women social roles, and typical sphere of interest' (Smith-Hefner, 1988, p.535).

**Excerpt B**

- Writer: is she having problem?
- Sara: what do you mean?
- Writer: wondering whether she got a problem so that she is not willing to chat.
- Sara: if she got a problem what are you gonna do?
- Writer: I'm asking means I want to know...only if you want to let me know..
- Sara: I'm also asking, if she' got a problem, what are you gonna do?

Writer: depending on the problem...if i am able, I will help..if I can't..I will  
just pray for her..

Sara: good...

In the above talk, the writer was trying to show his care to her elder relative by questioning what was happening. In response Sara asked back what he was going to do if her relative got a problem. This typical question may indicate that she was probing whether the writer is ‘‘a good candidate’’ for her relative. In response to this the writer tried to moderately answer that he does willing to give her a hand but that would depend on the nature of problem. He wanted to project image that he is a dependable person and yet is logical about writer's capability in handling the problem. Sara's confirmation that nothing happen with her sister indicates that she is just testing about his concern. This might imply that the ‘negotiation’ in match making is complex. This goes in line with Bloomaert (2005) issues on dating which involves and requests intricate narratives.

### Excerpt C

Writer: why keeping silent? ???????? (multiple question marks shows that the  
writer needs immediate answer)

Sara: -o (emoticon indicating surprise)

Sara: -/ (emoticon indication confused)

Writer: about me and your sister. So that our relationship is clear.

Sara: sleepy..(teasing the writer)

Writer: Ok..gud nite (informal of ‘‘good night’’)

Sara: hahaha when?

Writer: Frankly I don't to keep it longer..

Sara: when?

Writer: so that you will not always doubt me..

Sara: haha

Writer: I'm gonna make it

Sara: mr. There is no case for those who have just known each other will  
directly believe. Those ‘fallin in luv’ (informal word for fall in love)  
usually talk as what you are talking.

Sara: always being doubt..yep yep yep...but what we are heading is not just  
one day but for good. This means that if you seriously want to marry

- my relative it is not only you and...but also FAMILY (emphasising). I think you still do not know further about my family.
- Writer: so the point being?
- Sara: that's the reason why I am always doubting you..
- Writer: delay is better?
- Sara: -( (showing dissatisfaction)
- Writer: Ok if that's what you want
- Sara: what do you mean?
- Writer: means I am postponing my plan if i can get right from your answer
- Sara: Don't postpone it
- Writer: So?
- Sara: I'm just responding your question .. as you said that I am questioning your seriousness
- Writer: so what is to do then? Should I ask her or not?
- Sara: if you are already confident just propose it to her and give her time to think, YES or NO (firm answer), just do it like that, i think it is easy, who knows YOU ARE LUCKY (positive wish)
- Writer: yep I prefer it too, YES or NO.(expecting a firm answer)

The important point exists in the above chat is that marriage in her opinion is not merely about the couples but also the whole family. She also argues that the writer might not know deeply about her and her sister's family. Her arguments indeed denote what, some groups, apply to Javanese society that the concept of marriage also means the *involvement of family* in making the decision, even though sometimes they may reject it (Smith-Hefner, 1988). Yet this fact is in contrast with the finding (Malhotra, 1991; Smith-Hefner, 2005) stating that there has been significant shift to *self-marital choice* among men and women in Indonesia, especially in Javanese culture. This could be understood as the girl is from village where the family still hold old Javanese tradition even though she is educated (a bachelor graduate).

#### **Excerpt D**

- Sara: by the way in Makassar now there is Muktamar NU (one of Islamic schools national event to elect its leaders), in Jogja there is Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah (other religious school) and Indonesia is about to welcome President Barack Obama.



- Writer: yep I know, as I usually read the news about Indonesia on-line.
- Sara: not participate in one of them? As the Indonesian citizen
- Writer: hehe..it is not your real question, isn't it?
- Sara: what? As there is no other topic, always discussing my elder relative,  
I'm bored with it.
- Writer: hehe (laughing)

The above chat is interesting in that Sara is trying to identify the writer's religious affiliation by elaborating what was happening in Indonesia and which Islamic religious school the writer belongs to. Yet, again the same religious affiliation often plays a significant role in marriage affairs in Javanese culture. This seems underline that faith plays an important role for successful marriage in Indonesia (Nilan, 2008). The writer knew that it is pragmatic question but asking her back whether it is her real question. In respond to this she said that she is bored discussing the same topic (about her sister) most of the time. The writer's act of not answering her about writer's religious affiliation was meant to hide his identity. And yet, the question by matchmaker above might project the identity of Javanese status. Dhofier (1980) said that 'the status of individual Javanese is determined by a set of factors—occupation, wealth, family, place of residence, religion, taste and education' (p.48). However, accordingly, the Javanese stratification system is not simple one, in which one of them is the *degree of participation* in Islam.

### **Excerpt E**

- Sara: why do you love my relative?
- Writer: yeah in marriage is already clear, one of the most important things as  
you already know is the degree of one's religiosity and her character
- Sara: if only I can let you know..but forget it.
- Writer: if it is important to tell it if not don't do it.

The above excerpt describes her curiosity about the reason why the writer is falling in love with her relative. This might ask about the justifying reason of writer's choice. In his response, it is obvious that the writer is looking for a religious woman and that his answer reflects his concerns on choosing a good wife in Islam and thus it governs his way of life. This may reflect Javanese individual status (Dhofier, 1980).

#### 4. Discussion on Gendered Language (from chatroom)

From the whole conversation, there are some evidences in the chat that support the previous research on man and woman language done by (Lakoff 1970 cited in Ekerct and Ginet 2003; Crosby and Nyquist, 1977; McMillan 1977). However, most of the time counter those. This might be that the conversation is done through chatroom talk , where due to its bodiless existence, ‘liberate woman from subordinate position’ (Rodino, 1997 cited in Subrahmanyam; Greenfield; and Tynes, 2004, p.662). The facts which support the previous research was that the writer used more interruption during the whole conversation and Sara employs *indirectness* (e.g. excerpt D). Furthermore, she utilized quite frequently the use of emoticons during the chat (e.g. Excerpt C). This is what Thomas (2004) might mean that she ‘uses words and images for digital presence’ (p.358), as well as ‘conversational coherence and communicative register’ (Greenfield and Subrahmanyam, 2003, p. 713).

#### 5. Conclusion

Overall, it can clearly be seen that as one of example of Javanese culture and Islamic discourses, matchmaking and marriage related activities (in the above chatroom talk) are confined strongly to those two variables. While, the use of gendered language (man and woman language), partially capture the previous studies due to its different chat-medium.

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## **A GENRE ANALYSIS OF DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS IN GHANAIAN NEWSPAPERS**

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### **Abstract**

Although an unpleasant but common human phenomenon, death is publicly announced in a language that does not only create grief in the bereaved but also presents the deceased in a way that evokes appreciation for him or her. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the death announcement (DA) genre in terms of its schematic structure and linguistic features. Adopting Swales' (1990) rhetorical approach to genre analysis, the study examined a data set of 636 DAs from three leading public newspapers in Ghana. The research identified seven moves out of which five were obligatory and two optional. In addition, each move had distinctive lexico-grammatical features. Finally, the schematic structure together with the lexico-grammatical features pointed to a definitive set of socio-cultural norms and values of Ghanaians. This research has implications for genre studies and multicultural discourses, in general, and studies on death announcements, in particular. It also has implication for further research.

### **Key words:**

death announcements, genre, Ghana, multicultural discourse, newspapers

## 1. Background to the Study

The life of humans is noted to revolve around birth, marriage, and eventual death. Death, in particular, in several societies receives much attention. Among the major communicative events related to death are epitaphs, tributes, dirges, and obituaries (Moses & Morelli, 2004). In the present study we focus on obituaries or death announcements. Obituaries are presented in a manner that does not only create grief in the audience but also presents the deceased in a way that evokes appreciation for him or her (Askildon, 2007; Fernandez, 2007; Bryant & Peck, 2009).

At the outset, I draw a distinction between an obituary and a death announcement. As presented by Fernandez (2006), the term ‘obituary’ comes from the Latin word ‘obitus’, meaning departure (a common euphemistic word for death). It refers to a record of announcement of death or deaths, especially in a newspaper, usually comprising a brief biographical sketch of the deceased. According to Campbell (1971), an obituary contains minimal information including the deceased’s name, date of birth, place of residence, date of death and, sometimes, cause of death. As it concerns prominent people, it is written by an expert of a publishing firm, and it is free of charge. Campbell argues that an obituary can be pre-written on a file either by or for a notable individual who is still living. This makes it easy to allow detailed, authoritative and lengthy obituaries to appear quickly after the death of a prominent person.

Fernandez (2007) further distinguishes between informative and opinative obituaries. The first type is primarily aimed at giving relevant details about the death: the deceased, place and time of funeral, and next of kin. This is done through an impersonal language and concise expression. The language is presented in an objective and standardized manner. In other words, the language is not ornate. An informative obituary does not employ hyperbolic language to heighten emotions or praise the deceased and it is often written by an editorial staff in charge of writing such a genre. An opinative obituary, on the other hand, is written by a relative, friend or the funeral home staff. It offers a more emotive and intimate account of the deceased by means of consolatory and laudatory tactics to satisfy and assuage the feelings of surviving family members. Opinative obituaries are rather subjective and perform a peculiar function of impressing readers about the social status or the exemplary conduct of the deceased. In such cases, a greater part of the obituary is devoted to the ‘family stage’.

On the other hand, a death announcement (DA) is a paid for advertisement of a person’s death. It is normally written by a family member or a close friend, both of whom might not

necessarily be experts. Like an obituary, a DA is also published in newspapers but in Ghana, the latter is additionally posted on walls in strategic public places so as to capture greater attention of the public and to increase participation of the public in the funeral/burial services of the deceased. Also, a DA is much more elaborate. While an obituary is not necessarily aimed at inviting people who will want to pay their respects to the deceased, a DA does.

As claimed by Campbell (1971), the two terms are used interchangeably but the focus of this study is DAs. This choice is based on the fact that unlike obituaries, DAs occur frequently in Ghanaian newspapers.

## **2. Aim of the Study**

Diverse studies have been carried out on DAs. While some scholars like Al-Ali (2005), Fernandez (2006/2007), and Marzol (2006) investigated the figurative language of obituaries and DAs, others like Eid (2000), Booth (2002), and Nwoye (2007) concentrated on the structure of the DA genre and factors that influence the language of the DA. As far as I know, it is only Bonsu (2002, 2007) who studies obituaries (referred to in this work as DA) in Ghana, although he shows little interest in their schematic structure. The present study, therefore, seeks to find out whether the DA genre in Ghana has a common schematic structure that is accompanied by distinct lexico-grammatical features.

In what follows I situate the present study in the existing scholarship on DAs and obituaries followed by a description of the research site and the research approach adopted in the study. The analysis and discussion constitute the rest of the paper. The conclusion together with implications of the study ends the paper.

## **3. Previous Studies on Death Announcements/Obituaries**

This section, in particular, reviews the literature on the schematic structure of the DA genre, literary/linguistic devices explored by the DA genre, and the functions of the DA genre. The aim of this review is to indicate the place of the present study in the extant literature on DAs and obituaries.



### 3.1 *Structure of Death Announcements*

Several suggestions have been given concerning the generic structure of the DA genre. Watson (2008) alludes to four moves in writing an obituary. The first, introduction, comprises the name, age, date and place of death as well as course of death. The second move, biography, comprises the bio-data of the deceased: information on parents, organization in which the deceased were active, things they enjoyed doing, and significant challenges they faced. The third move is the list of surviving relatives. Watson is concerned about the order of the list which includes spouse, children (and their spouses), siblings, number of grandchildren, cousins, friends and co-workers in that order. The final move is what he categorizes as “additional information”, which includes place and time of wake (optional) and address of where donations, condolences and gifts can be sent.

Harold et al. (2009) present five moves which obituary writers must adopt. The first is “announcement”, which comprises two basic pieces of information: name of the deceased and cause of death. They stressed that these should be captured in a single sentence. The second move, biographical information, includes information like date and place of birth, schools attended, notable awards received and important hobbies. Harold et al. (2009) call the next move “survivor information”, which includes people who survive or share in the inheritance of the deceased. They include, in this order, the following: immediate family members (spouse, children, parents, siblings, step-children) and secondary family members (aunts, uncles, grandchildren, close cousins). It is advised that baptismal names of relatives should be used whereas nick-names should be put in quotes. Deceased relatives are the last in this move and their names are preceded by “the late”. Next is “scheduled ceremonies” – a note of where and when important ceremonies such as wake, grave-side burials and memorial services will take place. The final move is a note of where people can make donations.

These observations and stipulations of the schematic structure of DAs and obituaries aside, there are other studies on a similar subject in different geographical settings such as those by Al-Ali (2005) in Iran, Nwoye (2007) in Nigeria, and Bonsu (2002, 2007) in Ghana. In particular, in his study of the generic structure of obituaries in an Arabic setting, Al-Ali describes nine moves, some of which overlap with others identified in Matiki (2001), Bonsu (2002, 2007), and Nwoye (2007) in Malawi, Ghana, and Nigeria respectively. There are notable differences presumably which may be accounted for on the basis of their socio-cultural differences.

### 3.2 *Literary and Linguistic Devices in Death Announcements*

The extant literature reveals that obituary and DAs constitute a fertile ground for the use of linguistic and literary devices (Fernandez, 2006/2007; Rubinstein, 2007; Bressler, 2009; Nelson, 2009).

In particular, Fernandez, (2006/2007) identified devices that constitute the figurative language used in obituaries. They include metaphors, hyperbole, positively and negatively loaded words, and mitigating apology expressions on one hand and rhetorical questions and second person invocations on the other. He established that, from the 257 Victorian obituaries collected, metaphors are the most dominant of the literary devices. He added that metaphors portray death as a journey, loss, joyful life, rest, reward and as the end there is to life. The use of these literary devices, he concluded, was to make obituaries more emotive. Nelson (2009) shared a contrary view, arguing that euphemisms are unnecessary and even disrespectful to human life that was lost. Nelson held that phrases such as ‘passed away’, ‘called home’, and ‘went to his rest’ only assuage the pain that is associated with death, maintaining that it is high time people were made to feel the cruelty of death so as to come to terms with the awful truth that accompanies it.

Rubinstein (2007) studied DAs from Jewish holy texts and identified two classes of descriptive phrases which, to him, appeared rather dramatic and florid. One class of such phrases was used to display the social standing of the deceased whereas the other described the causes of death. Phrases like ‘pillar of the temple’, ‘light of Israel’, ‘leader of Lebanon’, ‘captain of the army of the kingdom of Torah’ and others were used to refer to Torah sages (religious leaders). Phrases like ‘suddenly departed’, ‘dived into tremendous waters’ and ‘snatched away’, were used. For Rubinstein, such devices portrayed the dramatic nature of death. One further striking feature that is worth noting in Rubinstein’s study is that whereas phrases like ‘of blessed memory’ and ‘of pious memory’ followed males’ names, female counterparts had just ‘may she rest in peace’ following their names. Rubinstein’s study shows that religion, status and gender are key factors that influence language use in DAs.

The use of language in obituaries in Anglo-American contexts provides further interesting findings. Indeed, Bressler (2009) found the language of British obituaries rather saucy and sarcastic, depending on the writer’s mood. He realized that, written in the form of story-telling, obituaries were not entirely sympathetic; rather, they stated the mere facts about the deceased. The probable reason was the outbreak of civil wars, which increased the number of deaths and gave no room for obituaries to be embellished with many figurative devices. On the other hand, Deaton (2009) and Gorshon (2009), in an American press release, noticed that Irish and

American obituaries shared a lot in common regarding linguistic devices used in them. They held that adjectival and adverbial phrases like ‘treasured’, ‘unexpected’, ‘peacefully’ and ‘sadly missed’, which dominated the obituaries, rendered them emotionally appealing.

The studies reviewed above obviously share some similarities and differ in terms of methodology, findings and presentations regarding the schematic structure and linguistic/literary devices in DAs. In so far as the present study is conducted in Africa, it can be said to be potentially similar to those previous studies by Matiki (2001), Bonsu, (2002, 2007), and Nwoye (2007). And in making use of a mixed approach, this study seems to be similar to studies such as Al-Ali (2005), Fernandez (2006/2007), and Marzol (2006). The point to ascertain is whether the mere identification of the present study with these previous studies on those two counts provides similar results.

#### 4. Methodology

This section aims first to describe the data sources and the data collection procedures adopted. The analytical framework used in analyzing the data is also spelt out.

##### 4.1 Data, Sampling, and Data Collection Procedure

The major data source considered for this research is a collection of DAs published in the two national dailies, *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* and a national weekly, *Mirror*. The table below presents the monthly distributions of DAs published in the *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times* and *Mirror* respectively during the first half of 2009.

**Table 1: Distribution of DAs in Three Ghanaian Newspapers**

<i>Month</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	<i>Mirror</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Jan</b>	54	20	13	<b>87</b>
<b>Feb</b>	63	34	16	<b>113</b>
<b>Mar</b>	57	39	21	<b>117</b>
<b>Apr</b>	47	29	11	<b>87</b>
<b>May</b>	57	30	17	<b>104</b>
<b>Jun</b>	76	31	21	<b>128</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>636</b>

As can be seen from the table above, a total of 636 DAs were collected. Three hundred and fifty-four (354), which constitute 55% of the DAs, was recorded by the *Daily Graphic*. The *Ghanaian Times* had 183 (29%) whereas the *Mirror* recorded the least number of 99 (16%). Additionally, June recorded the highest number of 128, forming 20% of the total number of newspapers. An average figure (113), which constitutes 17% of the DAs, was recorded in February while January and April recorded the least numbers of 87 respectively, constituting 16% of the total DAs collected.

A month was used in the data collection process. The attendant of the periodical section of the UCC Library willingly offered assistance. It would have been difficult for the researcher to consider every DA in every newspaper in Ghana. Besides, considering all DAs in the entire year (2009) would have been too vast for this study; hence, the restriction to the first half of the year was considered so as to limit the amount of data and enhance analysis of the data.

#### 4.2 *Method of Analysis*

This study utilized the mixed research approach (both quantitative and qualitative methods). The quantitative method enabled the researcher to present figures and facts in tables and other visuals in order to aid understanding while the qualitative method aided the researchers in providing illustrative sample texts and explaining the factors that influenced the various facts obtained.

Also, Swales' (1990) method of genre analysis was found equally useful. It served as the main analytical framework within which the schematic structure of the DA genre was analyzed. Swales defines genre as a set communicative acts with an overarching communicative goal and sub-rhetorical units (which he labels as 'moves') and their attendant lexico-grammatical features as distinguishing features of one genre from another. The content, which is the general information a particular genre puts across, is systematically structured into what Swales calls 'moves'. In other words, moves are the various structural and rhetorical systematic units within the genre which make it distinct from another genre. Together, the schematic structure, content, and lexico-grammatical features in this recurrent situational language use give vent to a genre, as noted by Bhatia (1993) and other genre analysts in the English for Specific Purposes tradition.

To identify the moves, as suggested in the literature (e.g. Bhatia, 1993), the semantic-functional criterion was used. It is recognized that this criterion is not full proof; thus, a second opinion regarding the determination of moves primarily was sought from a graduate student in the English Department who gladly offered to assist in this regard. Consequently, the inter-

rater reliability between the two researchers regarding the identification of the moves was 85% before discussion to deal with the differences. This inter-rater reliability was considered acceptable.

Finally, the present occasionally draws on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) multimodality perspective on textual analysis. This perspective on textual analysis, which rejects linguistic items as the only meaning-making device, recognizes space, colour, position, picture, size, among others, as worthwhile veritable semiotic devices.

## **5. Generic and Linguistic Description of Death Announcements/Obituaries**

From the data set, it was observed that DAs in the data set comprise seven moves. These are as follows: caption, list of family members and other organizations/institutions, profile of the deceased, funeral arrangements, a second list of family members, prescription of attire, and invitation. (Appendix A presents three samples of the DA genre, showing the moves described and discussed below). The linguistic resources were mainly nominal.

### *5.1 Caption*

The first move of the DA genre is the caption. In this move, the reader is oriented to the fact of death, albeit in various linguistic means. This fact of death is mostly conveyed in the form of nominals, ranging from words like “obituary” and “transition” to sentences like “He has passed away” and “His glory has come”. The caption is made to stand out by being presented in upper case, bold, indentation or underlining. Whether a word or a sentence, the caption basically gives a clue about the content of the DA genre: a report of death.

The figure below presents illustrative data on the various captions identified in the DAs collected. The four linguistic ranks (word, phrase, clause and sentence) are adopted for convenience and to aid classification of the captions.

**Figure 1: Captions of Death Announcements (DAs)**

<b>Words</b>	<b>Phrases</b>	<b>Clauses</b>	<b>Sentences</b>
<i>Obituary Transition</i>	<i>Funeral ann. A call to glory Eternal rest A life well lived A noble transition A call to eternity Home call Celebration of life Glorious home call Royal farewell At rest</i>	<i>Gone too soon Called to glory What a shock!</i>	<i>He has passed on. Fare thee well. Rest in peace. His glory has come. Inna Lilahi Wiana Illahim Rajium- Glory to Allah who gives and takes.</i>

As said earlier, the captions structurally range from words to sentences. The two words in the first column, namely ‘obituary’ and ‘transition’ are both nominal items which sum up the report (in this case, announcement) of death as a concept. However, ‘transition’ goes a step further to portray death as a ‘vehicle’ of passage from the present world of the living to the past world of ancestors. Also, ‘transition’ reinforces the African metaphysical concept that death is not an extinguisher of life but as a channel to join the ancestral world.

The phrase, “funeral announcement”, is a nominal one. Even though a noun, ‘funeral’ describes the type of announcement being talked about. The phrase does not carry any connotation apart from announcing death. However, other phrases like “glorious home call” and “noble transition” tend to embellish the concept of death. The adjectives ‘glorious’ and ‘noble’ rather portray death as though it were something ‘attractive’. This confirms the findings of Fernandez (2006), Bressler (2009), and Nelson (2009) that DAs employ figurative language to embellish the concept of death. ‘Eternal rest’, however, reinforces the African belief in reincarnation and immortality of the soul where the dead is considered to have gone to rest, although this resonates with the Christian belief.

In addition, some of the captions could be seen as clauses as some parts of the structures were ellipted. Captions such as ‘Called to glory’ and ‘Gone too soon’ have their initial structures, ‘He or she has been’ and ‘He or she has’ respectively ellipted. There are also sentences examples of which are written below:

- He has passed on. (declarative)
- His glory has come. (declarative)

- Fare thee well. (imperative)
- Rest in peace. (imperative)

The above sentences are simple in structure, with each having at least a subject and a verb. But while the first two are declarative sentences, the latter two are imperatives. The first sentence portrays death as a ‘vehicle’ of passage whereas the second sentence has a religious connotation of a person whose death is seen as a ‘glory’. The latter two sentences seem to command the deceased to journey well and to have a peaceful rest respectively. ‘Fare thee well’ must be noted as an old usage, which has a modern equivalence as ‘‘Good bye’’.

It is important to note that the variation in the captions above reveals the typical Ghanaian’s emotional attitude to death. At certain times, death is portrayed as a harsh phenomenon but at other times it is portrayed as though it is a pleasant phenomenon. In either case, this finding seems to resonate with Fernandez’s study which showed how Victorian obituaries made use of figurative language. Still, sometimes, death is presented as a normal occurrence, with neither negative nor positive feelings attracted.

## 5.2 *List of Members of Family, Clan, Organizations and other*

The next move of the DA genre is the list of family members and others. In general, this list comprises not only the family members of the deceased but also other clan, families or bodies (organizations) who were associated with the deceased (while s/he was alive) or the bereaved family. This move is also presented in nominal structures as it is a list of names.

This list does not include virtually everyone who forms part of the deceased’s family. Rather, it comprises key members like heads of clans and family elders, family members of high socio-economic status, religious leaders, leading political parties and political leaders, and some key members of associations or organizations to which the deceased or any relative of his/hers might have belonged. This part of the second move of the Ghanaian DA genre was not found in the previous studies such as Al-Ali (2005), Watson (2008), Harold et al. (2009).

This confirms the fact that the Ghanaian society does not only give primacy to the extended family system over the nuclear one but also highlights solidarity and a sense of belongingness to one’s family, clan and other organizations (social, political, religious, etc) one belongs to. Traditionally, a Ghanaian presumably belongs to two basic families: paternal and maternal even when his or her inheritance is one sided (that is, either matrilineal or patrilineal). Hence, even in the case of some Akans (the dominant ethnic group in Ghana, consisting of about 45%

of the entire population in Ghana) who inherit maternally, key members of the two sides of the deceased are represented in the list under discussion. Such a list is arrived at not without intensive consultation, as omission of a name required to be present can spark conflict and non-cooperation among family members in the funeral rites and burial services.

One needs to note that the order of this list is so hierarchical that the most key and dignified persons precede others who might be less recognized. Hence, it is possible that some members who are younger but who have some socio-economic influence may precede elder ones who are not socio-economically significant. Often, it is the case that traditional leaders such as chiefs are mentioned before reverend ministers and political leaders or people with substantial resources. The fact that not everybody in a family is listed but people with socio-economic worth indicates the place of wealth in the Ghanaian society. People tend to be accorded respect not for their age or admirable characters but rather for socio-economic worth. This suggests sadly that the contemporary Ghanaian society is trading some of its values, like respect for the elderly, for socio-economic wealth.

Also, the names of family members precede those who are not related to the deceased through blood ties but who have some other forms of relationship with the deceased or his/her family. This seems to confirm the assumption that the Ghanaian society is still communalistic and tends to keep strong family ties. Blood relations of the deceased are considered to matter more in the deceased's life than any organizations they might have belonged to. In most cases, the titles plus full formal names of the family members are written. In other cases, the family names, rather than the individual members' names, are written.

It must be noted also that this is the move which actually announces the death. A declarative sentence is often used but the choice of its linguistic features varies. Some examples identified include the following:

- ... *announce the glorious home call* of their *beloved* Cosmos Osei Forson...
- ... *announce the death* of Edward Kwame Agbenyega.
- ... *regret to announce the sudden death* of ...
- ... with *regret*, wish to inform the general public of the *death* of their *beloved*...
- ... *announce with deep sorrow the home call* of...
- ... *announce the passing on* of their *beloved daughter*...
- ...*announce with the deepest of regrets* ...
- ... *announce to the glory of God* ...
- ... *announce, with the hope of resurrection, the passing away* of ...



The above examples show that no matter the variation in linguistic choice, certain items are always present. The reporting verb, “announce” appeared in over 70% of the DAs collected. “Regret” is also often used to show that no matter how advanced a person was, his or her death is a loss which is regretted by the family. Also, “death” is often mentioned but it is sometimes replaced by other items such as “home call”, “glorious home call”, “passing on”, “passing away”, and “sudden departure”. These variations tend to embellish death and soothe its harshness, thereby confirming Fernandez’s (2007) claim that DAs tend to be figurative. The use of “Beloved” reveals how the Ghanaian society cherishes its members and tends to feel great sense of loss when these members die. Apart from soothing the pain of death, these linguistic choices reveal the attitude of Ghanaians towards death – a sense of loss.

### 5.3 *Profile of the Deceased*

This is the next move of the DA, which is also unsurprisingly nominal in nature. Here, the full formal name of the deceased is stated. The surname or family name is made to stand out through indenting, bolding or capitalizing or any other visual effect. The name is preceded by a title(s) and is post modified by cluster of adjectives, depicting the person’s profession, other social status, place and date of death.

In some cases, nicknames, put in parenthesis as recommended by Watson (2008), are added. Such nick-names are preceded by words such as either ‘a.k.a’ (which is the shortened form of ‘also known as’), ‘alias’ or ‘nee’. Many of the names are followed by the nicknames usually placed in parentheses and in a different font type to perhaps pre-empt any difficulty that readers may have in identifying the deceased, even with photographs added. Four hundred and two (63%) of the 636 DAs described the deceased by at least two of the depictions mentioned above.

This move also includes a photograph of the deceased which helps to identify them. It is interesting to note that all the DAs had photographs. In most cases, the photograph depicts the age or professional status of the deceased. The age of the deceased is also written either under the name or beside the photograph. Sometimes, in the case of the aged, two photographs are provided: one depicting the person’s youthful stage and the other depicting his or her old age. Sometimes too, the two photographs depict two different statuses of a person’s life, as for example as a public servant and later as chief (a traditional head of a community). This is possibly to aid identification where old-age overshadows the person’s physical looks. The use of two photographs, as part of the DA, was rarely observed in the literature reviewed. This shows how the Ghanaian DA is intended to help sympathizers to easily process the DA

information – to easily identify the deceased. The use of photograph was not recommended in the templates studied.

It is important to mention that features like hobbies and challenges faced by the deceased which were mentioned by Watson (2008) and Harold et al. (2009), as requirements of the DA genre, were not found in the Ghanaian DA genre. In Ghanaian DAs, the source of death of the deceased is not mentioned, although in a few cases, where the deceased passes on is revealed as ‘Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital’, ‘37 Military Hospital’, or ‘Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital’, which are leading hospitals in the country in terms of the high quality health facilities they provide.

#### 5.4 *Funeral Arrangement*

This move of the DA gives a description of the order of the funeral activities for the deceased. This begins with various linguistic expressions such as “funeral programme”, ‘funeral announcements’, and “funeral arrangements are as follows”. These are usually in different font type (bold) and followed by at least four ‘steps’: a) no wake b) lying in state c) burial service d) funeral rites e) thanksgiving service. Not every move had all these ‘steps’ as the use of these steps will depend on the families in question. It is the case that the first step under this move is expressed by the emphatic “There will be no wake” or “No wake”.

What is interesting about these steps is that they tend to be followed by adverbials such as adverbs of place, adverbs of time, and purpose phrases. For instance, where the step involves funeral rites we are told of “at the Presbyterian School Park”, “Near the Methodist Church”, “at the same venue”; where the step concerns thanksgiving service we have expressions such as “at 9:00 a.m. at the Pentecost Church”, “at House No 33/17 Bakaano, Sekondi”. There are also purpose expressions such as ‘for filing past’, ‘for refreshment’, and “for interment”. Obviously, in this move, place-names such as names of churches (e.g. EP Church, Wesley Methodist Cathedral), important landmarks in a community (e.g. opposite GOIL OIL Station, near SSNIT Guest House, and Forecourt of State House) are used. This move was found in the works of Watson (2008) and Harold et al. (2009).

Given the primary function of DAs (that is, announcing death and getting sympathizers to attend the funeral), this move of the DA genre seems to be the most important part as it provides the direction or information needed by sympathizers to attend the funeral ceremony. Surprisingly, this move is rather relatively short in the DA. This is a clear indication that the secondary function of the DA genre (showcasing socio-economic worth) seems to have overshadowed its primary concern in contemporary Ghana. This confirms the claims of Al-Ali

(2005) and Rajula (2008) that the DA genre is a breeding ground for showcasing socio-economic worth.

### 5.5 *List of Family Members (Survivors)*

This is the last obligatory move of the DA genre. It is a list of nominal items which are the names of the deceased's immediate family. This list differs from the first one in two ways. Whereas the initial one (in the first move) comprises mainly heads of family or clans, elders and other key figures, this second list has the deceased's immediate family, what Watson (2008) calls 'primary family' preceding the second group of remote family members (chief mourners most of who are repeated from the initial list), what Watson calls 'secondary family'.

Secondly, unlike the initial list, this list does not include organizations which have no blood ties with the deceased. In other words, nearly every member of this second list has some blood ties with the deceased. Members in this category (second list) include spouse, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, step children (where available), in-laws, cousins, nieces and nephews, uncles and aunts and chief mourners (key leaders of the family). So, the list exemplifies movement from close family members to distant family members. This list is also hierarchical but here, the list of immediate (nuclear) family members precedes those of distant (extended) family members. Also, the immediate family members are quite obligatory since they constitute the deceased's survivors (those who inherit his/her wealth). The distant or extended members are optional because in some cases, some are already mentioned as part of the initial list. Most of the members of the first list are repeated as chief mourners in the second list but some members in this second list like children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are not constant members of the initial list.

It is important to mention that in most cases, members in this second list are mentioned by their names, professions, places of work or places of residence, suggesting the kind of family the deceased comes from. It is also noted that sometimes family members who reside in foreign countries are identified by reference to those countries. This move often covers the largest textual space in Ghanaian DAs and this confirms the findings of Marzol (2006) which identified the 'family stage' (survivors) as the dominant move of the DA genre. After all, as noted in communication research, what is regarded as important often receives much space or time.

### 5.6 *Prescription of Attire and Invitation to Sympathizers*

Finally, the completion of the death announcement is often signalled by two moves: a prescription of attire and a statement inviting all sympathizers and well-wishers. These two are, however, not constant parts of the DA genre. They (prescription of attire and invitation to well-wishers) are considered to be optional because out of the 636 DAs collected, 308 (48%), that is, less than half of the data set, invited well-wishers whereas 275 (43%), again, less than half of the data set, prescribed attire. The prescription of attire is mostly affected by the age of the deceased. Black and red, black and white, exclusive black or white are often prescribed. The first two are prescribed in situations where the deceased is an adult but the latter two are prescribed in cases where the deceased are young adults and very old respectively. The data set shows the prescription of exclusive white for a man of 76 years whereas in another instance black and white are prescribed for a woman of 95 years.

Unlike Marzol's (2006) findings where the 'family stage' signalled the end of American and British obituaries, Ghanaian DAs end with a statement welcoming well-wishers as in "All sympathizers are cordially invited", "All are cordially invited", "All friends & sympathisers are cordially invited". A few times instead of the verb 'invited', 'welcome' is used. In general, the addressee of death announcements tends to be 'all, which is then specified as 'relatives' sympathisers', 'relatives, well-wishers', and 'friends'. The invitation is always expressed in the passive voice as in the examples cited. Compared to the announcement of death (the final part of the second move), the prescription of attire is shorter (in terms of text length). It is a simple sentence with five linguistic items as compared to the funeral announcement which has a longer length. This invitation could indicate the warm conviviality and hospitality of Ghanaians.

## 6 Conclusion

This final section provides a summary of the research findings, implications and recommendations for further research.

### 6.1 *Summary of Research*

The main objective of this research was to explore the schematic structure and lexicogrammatical features of the death announcement genre in a setting that has least featured in

such studies. In this respect, the study adopted Swales' rhetorical approach in genre analysis but that was occasionally complemented by aspects of the multi-semiotic approach. Six hundred and thirty six (636) DAs were collected from three leading public newspapers in Ghana, namely the *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times* and *Mirror*. The key findings are briefly presented below.

The DA genre in Ghana has five core moves: caption, a list of key members of the deceased's family and clan as well as organizations to which the deceased might have belonged, a profile of the deceased, the arrangement of the funeral activities, and a second list of family members only. However, there were two additional but optional moves: prescription of attire and extension of invitation. Prescription of attire could sometimes be placed anywhere in the DA but the extension of invitation, when present, always signalled the end of the DA. These two optional moves (found in Ghanaian DAs) were absent from other studies reviewed (e.g. Watson, 2008; Harold et al., 2009).

In response to the second research question asked whether the DA genre had specific lexico-grammatical features, the study revealed that the caption of the DA genre is nominal in structure. Besides, it structurally ranges from words to sentences sometimes, depending on age and status of the deceased. The second, third, and sixth moves were often expressed in a sentence, with the first two being couched in the active voice and the latter passive. The announcement of death (which is the final part of the second move) varied linguistically according to the age, gender and status of the deceased.

## 6.2 Implications

Based on the findings discussed above, the present study has three implications which relate to theory, practice, and future research.

First, in terms of theory, the analytical framework (Swales' moves) was found very useful as it enabled the identification of various moves in the DA genre. In particular, for the DA genre, five core moves were identified. There were two other optional moves. Their attendant lexico-grammatical features were also noted, with preference for nominals. This study contributes to the scholarship on genre studies, in general, and studies of DA, in particular. It has helped to locate the Ghanaian newspaper death announcements in the corpus of similar texts elsewhere in the world. The Ghanaian newspaper death announcements have a structure similar to those from Europe, Asia and America but are different in content, message, and lexico-grammatical features.

In terms of practice, this study has implication for not only professional and unprofessional writers of DAs but also for the general public in Ghana (including Ghanaians and various groups of people who come to Ghana for touristic, educational, cultural or economic reasons) who read DAs in Ghanaian newspapers and those pasted on strategic walls. Anyone who is given the task of writing a DA needs to be guided in his or her choice of schematic structure and linguistic items. Moreover, it is a response to societal expectations and norms and values as well as changes in society.

The above findings notwithstanding, the need for further research is heightened by the fact that there is no extensive body of literature on the DA genre pertaining to the Ghanaian setting, the exception being Bonsu (2002, 2007), as far as I know. Also, linguistic and contextual analysis of the DA genre is a broad and interesting topic which involves examining the linguistic resources employed by the DA genre and factors that inform the choice of those resources. The researcher, therefore, suggests further research of DAs on televisions (both public and private and c) a semiotic study of obituaries. The overall picture, however, is one of a need to examine and account for visual information in a more rigorous way, to ascertain just how the various visual modes utilised make and project their meanings. This will add to the ever expanding field of studies on obituaries and death announcements.

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**OVERCOMING THE STIGMA: A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS  
WITH PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS ON GHANA TELEVISION**

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**Abstract**

Over the last decade, persons living with HIV/AIDS in Ghana, as in other sub-Saharan African nations, have begun to confront their ordeal through various media sensitization programs against the stigma. As part of this concern, I explore two interviews granted to four Ghanaians living with HIV/AIDS on Ghana Television. The interviews, which lasted an hour, were analysed based on conversation analysis. Major findings showed that victims of HIV are becoming increasingly bold to break away from the shackles of stigmatization. The study also indicated that the interviewees were self-motivated to take a bold step to educate and encourage other selves affected by the disease. The analysis also revealed that the victims contracted the disease through other means other than sex. While the men claimed that they had no knowledge of how they contracted HIV/AIDS, the women, on the other hand, lamented that they were infected by the promiscuous lifestyles of their husbands. The study thus calls for massive education on HIV/AIDS and women empowerment.

**Keywords:**

HIV/AIDS, stigmatization, interviews, Ghanaian, Ghana Television

## 1. Introduction

In Ghana, as in many sub-Saharan African nations, the mention of AIDS signals “an almost apocalyptic level of devastation” (Craddock, 2004: 1). A major reason is that with less than 8 per cent of the world’s population, sub-Saharan Africa encompasses an estimated two-thirds of global AIDS cases (UNAIDS, 2001). Although West Africa has suffered less compared to Eastern and Southern Africa, the situation is changing quite rapidly as Cote d’Ivoire is now among the 15 worst affected countries in the world, while the epidemic continues to rise in neighboring Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal (Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). Research has shown that commercial sex, sexually transmitted diseases and the neglect of condom use are critical factors that bring about the HIV epidemic in Cote d’Ivoire (Anarfi, 1990; 1992; Sassan-Morokro *et al.*, 1996; Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). Studies have also shown that HIV/AIDS became rife in Ghana through the activities of Ghanaian commercial sex workers from the Eastern part of the country in the early 1980s who returned home from Cote d’Ivoire very feeble and weak ([http://wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS\\_in\\_Ghana](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS_in_Ghana); Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). Thus from that time on HIV/AIDS in Ghana has become synonymous with sexual promiscuity

As a consequence, HIV/AIDS is becoming a life threatening problem in Ghana as the number of reported cases is frightening. From a low case figure of 42 AIDS cases in 1986, the number more than skyrocketed to 41, 229 at the end of September, 2000 (Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004: 76). The authors further add that more than 90,000 Ghanaians have died from AIDS since the early 1980s, and that an estimated 120,000 children have regrettably become orphans. In respect of the demographic pattern of the epidemic, Ghana’s case is unique compared to other African countries that exhibited a somewhat equal male-female ratio in the sense that the pattern in Ghana was about 5 females to 1 male, although a 1: 1 ratio is pretty imminent (Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). According to Agyei-Mensah (2001), Ghana’s current pattern resembles the typical sub-Saharan Africa with females comprising 55 per cent. Both young males and females have also become vulnerable, the latter being more vulnerable than the former (Addai, 1999 cited in Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). The vulnerability of these young female is due to their powerlessness to negotiate condom use in premarital sexual relationships (Ankomah, 1998). Worse still, such biological differences as a larger mucosal surface increase exposure of the disease among women, and the fact that there are more viruses in sperm than in vaginal secretions (Oppong & Agyei-Mensah, 2004). Also, that a majority of

women are increasingly financially dependent on men means that they hardly have a say in issues concerning sex and the sexuality of their partners.

Despite the massive campaign and public education offered by the agencies of the government of Ghana, pragmatic knowledge of HIV/AIDS is not accessible in the nation. Both the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ghana Aids Commission (GAC) have over the years been very active in the dissemination of information, public education and provision of anti-retroviral drugs (ARDs). None the less, a lot of Ghanaians not only discriminate against persons living with the disease thereby condemning them in the process, but also stigmatize them in all spheres of life. Research has increasingly shown that stigmatization is one of the most painful evil wrought on persons living with HIV/AIDS (Anick & Yarbrough, 1984; Bond & Bond, 1986; Friedman, 1997). According to Doku (2009: 6), “Stigma is a powerful tool of social control which is often used to marginalise, isolate and make others coil up”. When an HIV or AIDS patient is stigmatized in societies such as the Ghanaian, they are made to feel less human. So harrowing is the experience that the disease brings them so close to their deaths. In many cases, they are denied family support and succour, and access to public amenities because they are extremely ridiculed (McGoldrick, 1989; Williams, 1989; Nichols, 1998). Sadly enough, it is women living with HIV/AIDS who suffer most from the brunt of the infection. In sub-Saharan Africa, females account for 76% of the young people living with HIV aged between 15-24 years (Kurtz & Luke, 2002). The co-authors further contend that women face a lot of discrimination and violence, and that this has acted as a major stumbling block against them on getting educated on how the virus is transmitted and how they can prevent themselves.

However, in the last decade persons living with HIV/AIDS are beginning to kick against the bondage of stigmatization. Operating through organised societies, HIV/AIDS victims are now showing their images on television screens. Few of them are also being granted interviews on other media outlets. Together, they believe that education is important in decreasing stigma and other misconceptions on prevention measures, the use of condom and reproductive health. In this paper, I explore two interviews granted by Gifty Anti, the hostess of ‘The StandPoint’, a Friday female advocacy television show, on Ghana Television. The study examines the motivations underlying the interviews of persons living with HIV/AIDS on television using conversation analysis, given the risks associated with such an attempt. Specifically, the work explores how the interviewees contracted HIV/AIDS, ascertains the reasons persons living with HIV/AIDS would like to be interviewed on Ghana Television, and also examines the effects of stigmatization on persons living with HIV/AIDS from the perspective of the interviewees.

## 2. Data Source and Methods

### 2.1 *'The Standpoint' as a Female Advocacy Television Show*

'The StandPoint' (SP) is a female advocacy television show aired on Ghana Television (GTV), the official television network of the Republic of Ghana. The show is the proud initiative of Gifty Anti, a news presenter at the nation's television station. Only three years old, SP has already won national awards as it has reportedly given the platform to many Ghanaian women to express their views, opinions and sentiments on pertinent issues concerning women. The show, which operates under the motto '*Listen to the Feminine Side*', emphasises the unique place of the Ghanaian woman in a dominant patriarchal society, and aims to project the position of the Ghanaian woman and assert her right in the face of adversity against her. Among the many topics discussed on the show are love and marriage, women and formal education, female genital mutilation (FGM), widowhood rites and child and sexual abuse.

SP gathers professional women to discuss these pertinent issues. But the programme is not anti-andro-genic. This is to say that it also features men who believe in the course of women; sometimes, the hostess invites men who have expert knowledge on issues of women or have had some experiences on certain subjects to share their experiences.

### 2.2 *Conversation Analysis as an Analytical Framework*

Conversation analysis (henceforth CA) was developed into a distinctive field of enquiry by the sociologists Sacks, Schlegloff and Jefferson (Sacks *et al.*, 1974; Stubbs, 1983). CA is concerned with the detailed organisation of everyday interaction or spoken discourse which tends to be usually dialogic. The method favors fine-grain analyses often of quite short stretches of conversation. Key issues CA analysts are interested in include (a) how people take turns in a conversation, (b) how they open and close turns, (c) how they launch new topics, close old ones, shift topics, etc. and (d) what makes a conversation generally progress satisfactorily from one utterance to the next.

The basic unit of speech in CA is the individual speaker's turn. A turn is each occasion that a speaker speaks and a turn ends when another speaker takes a turn. This is based on social interaction in the first place rather than on any phonological, lexico-grammatical or semantic considerations. Conversation analysts are interested in how speakers achieve smooth turn-taking, and what the 'rules' are for who speaks them.

In any ordinary, informal conversation, there is hardly any overlap or interruption, and only minimal silences between turns, if there is any silence at all. Sacks *et al.* (1974) observed that

speakers are permitted to take turns when they are chosen or nominated by the current speaker, or if one is directly selected, they may speak of their own choice. This is called self-selection. If neither of these conditions apply, the current speaker can simply continue. The language provides us with ways of getting the next turn. These vary in appropriateness to different contexts. Such back-channel responses as *Mmm*, *uhuh*, *yeah* and *sure* show that the listener is still following the speaker and wishes him or her to continue.

Another important aspect of turn-taking is the way interlocutors predict one another's turns and often complete the speaker's utterance for them. Also, they often overlap with the speakers as they complete the speaker's utterance even though the speaker is still talking. Neither back-channels nor completions or overlaps are normally perceived as interruptions or as rude. For conversation analysts, they represent a co-operative activity by participants to facilitate communication. Thus a major strength in using CA is that conversations are often based on actual recorded data of naturally occurring interactions rather than contrived or simulated data.

### 2.3 *The Interviews and Interviewees*

The interviews were conducted by Gifty Anti on StandPoint of GTV fame on 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2012. The first group was made up of a family—a Reverend Minister of a charismatic church based in Accra, his wife and their 18 year old daughter who is a university student at a private university in Accra (names withheld). The attempt to withhold the original names of the interviewees is very important because “whatever the specific nature of their work, researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 56).

Even though the interviews were already in the public domain prior to this research, it was considered ethically disturbing to use them as data for the study without the approval of the interviewees. In overcoming this practical limitation, I used generic names as they do not refer to specific persons. The second group comprised two widows. Together, the level of education of the groups was intermediate because they did not speak Standard English and so intertwined their level supported their lack of proficiency with the local Ghanaian language, that is Twi, a major dialect of Akan (Nyarko, 2008) save the teenage girl. Each of the interviews lasted thirty minutes. The recorded interviews were then transcribed. To ensure that biases were reduced to the minimal level, the transcribed texts were shown to another colleague to cross-check and validate them.

#### *2.4 Method of Analysis of Transcripts*

The interview transcripts were then analyzed using qualitative content analysis. In practice qualitative content analysis enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), a person's or group's conscious or unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas often are revealed in their communications through a rigorous content analysis. A major advantage for using content analysis is that it is unobtrusive. A researcher can observe a phenomenon without being observed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This is particularly true in the sense that the contents being analyzed are not influenced by the researcher's presence. Moreover, information that might be difficult or even impossible to obtain through direct observation can be gained unobtrusively using content analysis.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

A close observation of the transcribed interviews brings to light three main issues. These are HIV/AIDS victims' boldness to break away from the shackles of stigmatization, that the victims contracted the deadly disease through no fault of theirs, and how lifestyles contribute to the contraction of HIV/AIDS.

#### *3.1 Boldness of Victims to Overcome Stigmatization*

The analysis of the transcripts shows that persons living with HIV/AIDS are becoming increasingly bold in confronting the problem of stigmatization. According to them, the days when HIV/AIDS patients confined themselves to their doom are over. The interviewees were of the view that it serves no purpose to die in silence. They felt that if society continues to stigmatize persons living with the virus, it is because little or no efforts have been made by themselves to speak against it, much less overcome the stigma. Below is an expert from the interviews of Gifty Anty, the host of StandPoint, with the Reverend Minister.

**Extract 1**

- 019 Gifty: So Rev. Ike, how did you feel thinking about wanting to go public with your situation? Do you know that you're a man of God? So how did your church take it?
- 022 Rev. Ike: Hmm! I know more than ever that I've become a public ridicule. At first, I felt like committing suicide.
- 024 Gifty: Really? Did you ever think of anything like that?
- 025 Rev. Ike: Of course I did. At first I didn't understand what was happening. I said why me? Why me? Gifty, you know something?
- 026 Gifty: Tell me pastor.
- 027 Rev. Ike: As a man of God, I cannot lie. I was a virgin till I married my wife seated by me. So you see, with time I've come to realize that God encouraged me to come to be bold enough to tell the whole world about it. Do you know that some pastors also living with the virus now call on me for advice and direction?
- 031 Gifty: Hmm. Now let me turn to you Sofo Maame (Pastor's wife). How did you feel when you got to know that you have the HIV and what has been your ordeal?
- 034 Rev's Wife: Deadening. I knew next to nothing about what was wrong with me. I grew leaner and leaner every passing day, and attended countless prayer camps. When my husband could bear the pain no more and took me to the hospital, that was when we realized the SHOCKING NEWS. Since then, life became unbearable as my family (husband, and my children, though the children are negative) was called the AIDS family. We could do nothing. The church even disowned us.
- 041 Gifty: The church too!!
- 042 Rev's Wife: But here we are, we'd like to tell the whole world that such a practice is in itself anti-Christian.

It is, therefore, clear from the excerpt that both the Reverend Minister and his wife were humiliated by the torture and pain of contracting what many Ghanaians believe to be a disease inflicted on the unrighteous. In the case of the former, he himself did not understand how and why he had to contract the disease since, according to him, he stood right in the sight of God. But despite this shame, they have been doing the most important thing by coming out of their



‘shells’ to tell the world about the negative effects of HIV/AIDS. Such a conviction was driven by their belief that they are innocent.

### *3.2 Innocent Victims of HIV/AIDS*

As demonstrated earlier, Reverend Ike and his wife strongly believe that they had contracted HIV/AIDS through no fault of theirs.

#### **Extract 2**

- 057 Rev's Wife:      Like my husband, I did nothing wrong. I was also a virgin. He himself can testify. But Gifty you see when it comes to these things, people easily forget that the disease can be contracted through other means other than sex.
- 061 Gifty:            Thank you Madam. But tell me Ama you are their daughter how did it affect you?
- 063 Ama:            As a child, I remember how confrontational I was. Many times, I directly demanded answers from my parents. I wept on so many occasions. But as I grew up, I am beginning to give them the needed emotional support. I have shunned the stigma and am maturing quite faster just to cope with the pain.

In this excerpt, we see an 18 year old girl trying to adjust to the challenge of being a daughter to parents living with the HIV virus. Indeed, such an attempt is not only proper and befitting, it is also life saving. Perhaps, it is this hope that keeps her parents alive and to want to educate others about the devastating nature of the fatal malady.

### *3.3 Gender and Lifestyles*

This section of the work relates to the second group of interviewees who are widows apparently in their forties. According to them, they contracted HIV/AIDS through the flirtatious lifestyles and intransigence of their husbands. In Ghana as in many African states, many women are faced with a number of life-threatening challenges such as HIV/AIDS as a result of economic hardships. For example, a lot of them are not free to make decisions about the use of condoms during sexual intercourse with their partners, neither do they have the right to abstain or engage in a sexual act. It is not surprising then that both female interviewees said

that their husbands concealed the secrets from them to the time they were so shrunk and were about to pass away.

### **Extract 3**

094 Gifty: So how did you come to know that you have the disease?

095 Widow 1: Auntie Gifty, I never knew I too could be a victim of AIDS. It all started when my husband with whom I've three children incessantly started falling ill. One day when he could no longer cope with the ravaging effects of the disease, he beckoned me and asked for forgiveness. I never understood why he had to do this until he told me he had AIDS. He died not too long after.

Painful as it may sound, the excerpt above epitomizes the experiences of many women in Ghana and other parts of the world with respect to the contraction of the HIV/AIDS. In Ghana, a number of men are still of the view that is they who pay the piper and so have to call the music. They, therefore, do not expect their wives to question their ways of life. The popular saying among them is that as men, it is only prudent to keep a farm and also have a backyard garden, metaphorically representing a mistress or a girl friend. The converse is unheard of and detestable which could even attract serious sanctions such as divorce or even battering in certain traditional societies in Ghana.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to discuss the ordeal suffered by some persons living with the HIVvirus in Ghana and their resolve to overcome the stigma associated with the disease. As part of this resolve, HIV/AIDS patients in the last decade have become courageous enough to tell the whole world about their status through several media such as the radio and television. In one of these advocacy programs on The StandPoint on Ghana Television, three major issues came up. In the first place, the interviews showed that the victims of HIV are no more diffident of being referred as such. They believe that this is the only way of overcoming the stigma and encourage others not to suffer in silence (Hampton, 1991). The interviews also reveal that some persons living with the disease who are married may have contracted the disease innocently, and not necessarily as a result of their promiscuous lifestyles. Some may have had the disease

through other means other than sex. Lastly, among the women interviewed they were infected with the HIV virus through their husbands who cheated on them, and yet never informed them until they were about to die. And whether the accounts were prettified by the narrators, it is not ours to authenticate or otherwise verify the verity of their stories. What should be admired of them, however, is their courage to show the whole world how far they have come, for it serves no good purpose to deceive the public of an epidemic one is no victim of.

The findings of this study bear three major implications. First, it seeks to raise awareness that persons living with the disease still have their fundamental human rights with which to enjoy the goodness of life. This is because they are human and need not be treated as persons cursed with an abominable disease (Friedman, 1997). Second, the research aims to encourage other persons living with the HIV virus to be bold enough to seek counseling and guidance and seek medical attention rather than wanting to die in silence. To the home, this work hopes to bring relief to families that seem to be wrecked due to a member of the family suffering from the disease (Axnick & Yarbrough, 1984; Williams, 1989). There is hope in collaborating to support one another.

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## CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR E-JOURNAL *LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE AND SOCIETY*

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## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AWARD & GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

*from: Stéphanie Cassilde, Chair of the RC25 Award Committee*

Dear members, I am pleased to announce the creation of two RC 25 awards. The « Language & Society Graduate Student Award » is dedicated to promising researcher. The « Language & Society Academic Award » is devoted to active scholars in the field. Both awards are linked to *Language, Discourse & Society*, which is the new e-journal of RC 25. These awards were defined in accordance with the full board and we exchange a lot to create all steps of the selection process. The first edition of RC 25 awards will take place in Buenos Aires with a ceremony at RC 25's reception. I am looking forward to read your work in *Language, Discourse & Society* and to see you there.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the award for Academic Excellence is to promote scholarship and to recognize academic excellence in the field of language and society.

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